1987

The value of assignment-specific writing scales for ESL composition

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The value of assignment-specific writing scales for ESL composition

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Approved:

Signature redacted for privacy
In Charge of Major Work

Signature redacted for privacy
For the Major Department

Signature redacted for privacy
For the Graduate College

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1987

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the years, a number of writing scales have been devised to help composition teachers evaluate student papers. Used in both native speaker and English as a second language (ESL) settings, these scales have generally been regarded as tools which make the evaluation of writing more objective. At least this is a view common in writing programs which recommend their use, one rationale being that teachers who use writing scales are fairer and more consistent in their judgments about student writing (Spandel, 1981).

In the best discussion to date of writing scale options, Cooper (1977) describes several scales of use to classroom teachers. These range from fairly complex diagnostic scales to informal feedback schemes requiring students to follow a prescribed checklist when responding to each other's writing. However, judging from the writing scales which appear in freshman handbooks, teaching journals, and other published sources, most scales used to evaluate assigned themes are analytic in character. Useful for diagnosing writing problems and explaining judgments about writing to students, such scales assume the individual characteristics of writing can be described and a score assigned for each. These scores are usually then added to arrive at a meaningful total.[1]

[1]The term "analytic" is used quite broadly here. Cooper (1977) uses this term in a narrower sense to distinguish between analytic scales and other scale types. However, he concedes that in the area of writing evaluation, there is still "some uncertainty about terminology" (p. 4). Subscores are usually not added in primary trait scales. These are scales which focus on a single writing characteristic or trait (cf. Mullis, 1976).

Writing scales based on the analytic principle noted above fall into two main types, the first and by far the most common being generic scales. As their name implies, generic scales are a class of scales designed to help teachers evaluate writing over a wide range of discourse--typically all expository writing (i.e., writing focusing on a subject or topic with the intent to explain or persuade). They are able to do this because of the categories and descriptors they employ which specify only the general features of writing regardless of type or rhetorical context. As a result, generic scales have long been used to assess general writing ability, an assumption underlying their use being that student skill with one writing task predicts general skill--in other words, good writing is good writing.

Differing considerably from generic scales is the second scale type of use to classroom teachers--assignment-specific scales. A relatively recent scale approach, assignment-specific scales are designed, as their name suggests, to help teachers evaluate writing done for a specific task or assignment. Two assumptions underlie their use. The first is that different types of writing require different skills and the second that teachers can be guided to evaluate student success with these skills.

Like their generic counterparts, assignment-specific scales attempt to describe individual features of writing, assigning a score for each. However, whereas a generic scale selects qualities considered essential for success in most modes, an assignment-specific scale focuses on only those features considered necessary in a given assignment. An important consequence is that for sentence-level matters, assignment-specific scales

are no improvement over generic scales, since discrete syntactic and mechanical features like sentence structure and punctuation are not easily related to a specific type of writing.[2] However, in contrast to generic scales which provide little or no indication of the relationships between writer, subject matter, and audience, assignment-specific scales employ descriptors which give a fairly explicit picture of the rhetorical problem inherent in a particular assignment.[3] These descriptors may specify certain organizational and arrangement features as well.

Problem Definition

One obvious reason for the widespread use of generic scales is their adaptability. Because the categories and descriptors they employ are so broad, generic scales may be used for a variety of writing assignments. In ESL composition, a generic scale like the ESL Composition Profile is a case in point. Designed for expository writing, the Profile, as it is often called, is commonly used for a variety of assignments. In fact, its makers list several dozen assignments for which the Profile is suited (Hughey et al., 1983). Yet, because the terms and descriptors such scales employ are so general, it is difficult to see how a generic scale could be

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[2]Primary trait scales, one of the two assignment-specific scale types, do not generally focus on sentence-level features of writing. However, some primary trait scale users append a short subscale to the main scale for matters such as syntax and mechanics (Hume, 1980; Mullis, 1984).

[3]Here "assignment" means a writing task which specifies at least in a general way the writer's role, the subject matter, and the audience. Freewriting which specifies none of the above factors is not considered to be an assignment (cf. Hillocks, 1986, pp. 238-239).

used to teach all the criteria of a particular assignment. Although generic scales are useful for identifying sentence-level features such as syntax and mechanics, which can usually be defined in fairly specific terms, for rhetorical or special organizational features, such scales serve only as a rough shorthand for communicating judgments about writing to students. At a minimum, they require continual clarification and explanation.

Assignment-specific scales have some advantages over generic scales. While for sentence-level matters they cannot improve on generic scales, for rhetorical concerns their relatively specific descriptions are a clear advance. Because students are often confused by such matters, teachers may find such specificity useful. In addition, assignment-specific scales often provide information regarding organizational or arrangement features peculiar to a given assignment. Thus, while not eliminating the need for teacher explanation of writing criteria, assignment-specific scales would probably reinforce such explanations. At the very least, their use would likely increase student understanding of the assignment criteria as well as reduce the amount of needless teacher clarification.

Yet, because they are fairly new, it is difficult to know how ESL composition teachers will view assignment-specific scales. Despite the rhetorical specificity such scales offer, many teachers will undoubtedly raise legitimate questions concerning the development and use of assignment-specific scales. Being pragmatists, they will likely ask if it

is easy or even possible to devise such scales. Accustomed to using generic scales, they may question whether it is practical to have a different scale for each assignment. Finally, aware of their students' needs, they may ask if students will be confused by such scales. As a result, this study set out to answer the following questions:

1. Are current procedures for developing assignment-specific scales workable? Is it realistic to expect that ESL teachers can develop their own assignment-specific scales? Why or why not?
2. How do teachers in one ESL composition program react to an assignment-specific writing scale? Do they find such a scale acceptable? Why or why not?
3. How do ESL composition students react to an assignment-specific writing scale? Do they find such a scale understandable, helpful, and easy to use? Why or why not?

Methods

This exploratory investigation consisted of two phases which are described below. During the first phase, data were gathered to answer the three research questions outlined above. During this phase, another question emerged:

4. Is the assumption teachers hold regarding the efficacy of oral explanations and written comments to explain the criteria of a particular assignment valid? Why or why not?

Data collected during the second phase of this study were used to address this fourth question.

Phase one: Extending over a three-month period, the initial phase of this research project began with the development of an assignment-specific writing scale, no example scale of this type being available for ESL-level writing. Designed for the comparison/contrast report which ESL graduate students at Iowa State University are often required to write in a technical writing course known as English 100D, this scale was dubbed the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (hereafter the CCR scale). Because the CCR scale was based on the SFAS scale model (see Chapter II for a description of SFAS scales), the answers to the first three questions were limited to this scale design. As principal scale editor, I report information which addresses question one regarding the workability or practicality of procedures for developing assignment-specific scales. To answer questions two and three concerning teacher and student reactions to an assignment-specific scale, six ESL teachers and 12 ESL students enrolled in English 100D participated. In one of two sessions, the teachers used, rated, and commented on both the CCR scale and a generic scale--the ESL Composition Profile. Asked to revise their comparison/contrast reports using the CCR scale as a guide, the students rated and gave written opinions regarding this scale.

Phase two: During the discussion sessions involving the six ESL teachers, most of the instructors indicated that they preferred to use a generic scale applicable to a wide variety of assignments. The common opinion was that, even though a generic scale such as the Profile only expressed the assignment criteria in general terms, teachers could adequately explain to students the specific features peculiar to each

assignment. The teachers indicated that such explanations could take two forms, the first being oral in-class explanations and the second being specific, concrete comments on student papers. However, given research findings which suggest that oral explanations and written comments are often ineffective (Hillocks, 1986), I questioned the teachers' assumption that they could adequately explain the assignment criteria relying solely on oral explanations and written comments. It was not possible to test the validity of this assumption and answer question four by gauging the quality of oral teacher explanations for a given assignment. Such a research focus would be an entire investigation in itself. However, it was possible to approach the question in a limited way by examining the quality of teacher comments on student papers written for a particular assignment. To do this, the comments and correction markings on 50 comparison/contrast reports from English 100D were examined. These comments and markings, written by teachers employing the Profile to evaluate each report, were analyzed for how well they clarified and explained the assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the Profile. This analysis focused mainly on the comments categorized as focusing on rhetorical rather than sentence-level features.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Divided into two parts, the following is a discussion of relevant literature concerning the writing scales used by classroom teachers. Providing a more complete description of generic and assignment-specific scales, the first section presents examples of each scale type and also describes procedures for developing these scales. The second section focuses on the instructional uses of writing scales.

Generic and Assignment-Specific Scales

Generic scales

Generic scales range from simple scales listing only broad category headings like ideas, support, organization, expression, and mechanics (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963) to quite detailed scales with numerous descriptors. An example of the latter scale is the Diederich scale. Consisting of eight categories grouped in equal number under the headings of General Merit and Mechanics, the Diederich scale has three descriptors corresponding to the high, middle, and low performance levels for each category. These categories are shown below along with the "High" descriptors for Ideas and Organization whose doubled numerical values in the scale reflect the teaching emphasis of the writing programs which initially used this scale (Diederich, 1974).

	Low		Middle		High	
General Merit						
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10	
Organization	2	4	6	8	10	
Wording	1	2	3	4	5	
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5	_____

Mechanics						
Usage	1	2	3	4	5	
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5	_____
					Total	_____

Ideas:

The student has given some thought to the topic and writes what he really thinks. He discusses each main point long enough to show clearly what he means. He supports each main point with arguments, examples, or details; he gives the reader some reason for believing it. His points are clearly related to the topic and to the main idea or impression he is trying to convey. No necessary points are overlooked and there is no padding.

Organization:

The paper starts at a good point, has a sense of movement, gets somewhere, and then stops. The paper has an underlying plan that the reader can follow; he is never in doubt as to where he is or where he is going. Sometimes there is a little twist near the end that makes the paper come out in a way that the reader does not expect, but it seems quite logical. Main points are treated at greatest length or with greatest emphasis, others in proportion to their importance.

Another generic scale is the ESL Composition Profile. Designed for ESL expository writing, the Profile, as it is often called, differs from the Diederich scale discussed above. Teachers who use it evaluate papers from five different perspectives or "windows" of communicative effectiveness: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics, each weighted according to their approximate importance in ESL writing. Each of these categories is further broken down into four numerical mastery levels with the following descriptors: Excellent to Very Good, Good to Average, Fair to Poor, and Very Poor. More complete descriptor statements accompanying the Profile help teachers understand

and distinguish the mastery levels within each category (Jacobs et al., 1981; see Appendix A for a copy of the Profile).

Assignment-specific scales

Assignment-specific scales consist of two types. At least in a general sense both specify the rhetorical relationships required in the assignments to which they correspond. They may also specify certain organizational or arrangement features peculiar to the assignment. However, they differ according to the degree to which they specify the assignment situation. Assignment-specific scales which do not specify a particular situation may be classified as situation-free assignment-specific scales (hereafter SFAS scales). SFAS scales correspond to the general conception of an assignment familiar to most writing teachers. While specifying the rhetorical problem inherent in an assignment, SFAS scales may or may not correspond to a specific assignment situation. For example, a teacher might ask students to write a persuasive letter to an authority protesting a problem of some kind, providing a general rhetorical framework but otherwise leaving the assignment quite open. In choosing their own topic and approach to the assignment, students would define the rhetorical situation themselves. Some students might address a city council regarding various public safety matters. Others might address university officials concerning problems with the campus mail service or the student health clinic. Assuming that students follow instructions, the result for the teacher is a number of different papers albeit within the rhetorical type specified by the assignment. However, at other times, the teacher might restrict the

assignment to a narrow rhetorical situation. For example, she or he might require all the students to write a letter to a toy manufacturer requesting that a dangerous plastic toy be altered or discontinued.[1]

A good example of a SFAS scale is the Personal Narrative Writing Scale (PNWS) described by Cooper (1977). Developed by Cooper and several Buffalo-area teachers for high school personal narrative writing, the PNWS focuses on 11 features considered essential for such writing--each accompanied by three descriptors corresponding to the high, middle, and low quality levels defined by the scale. Grouped under the headings of General Qualities and Diction, Syntax, and Mechanics, these features along with the "High" descriptors and accompanying definitions the PNWS employs for Author's Role and Style or Voice are shown below.

	Low		Middle		High	
General Qualities						
Author's Role	2	4	6	8	10	
Style or Voice	2	4	6	8	10	
Central Figure	2	4	6	8	10	
Background	2	4	6	8	10	
Sequence	2	4	6	8	10	
Theme	2	4	6	8	10	____
Diction, Syntax, and Mechanics						
Wording	1	2	3	4	5	
Syntax	1	2	3	4	5	
Usage	1	2	3	4	5	
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	____
					Total	____

[1] In a strict technical sense, then, SFAS scales are not assignment-specific scales but rather scales specific to a particular rhetorical type. That is, a SFAS scale does not correspond to a specific assignment but rather to a very narrow range of rhetorically similar assignments. As a result, SFAS scale criteria are slightly more general than the criteria of scales like primary trait scales which by design are always limited to a specific situation.

Author's Role[2]:

The author's role is the relationship of the author to the subject, incident, or person. In autobiography the author writes about himself/herself. He/she is the main participant. Most of the time he/she will use the pronouns, I, me, we, us. In biography the author writes about some other person. He/she is not involved in what happens; he/she is just an observer. He/she uses the pronouns, he, she, him, her, it, they, them.

The author keeps his/her correct role of either participant or observer throughout.

Style or Voice:

The author states what he/she really thinks and feels. Expressing personal experiences, the writer comes through as an individual, and his/her work seems like his/hers and his/hers alone. The voice we hear in the piece really interests us.

In contrast to SFAS scales, which may or may not specify rhetorical situation, is the second assignment-specific scale type. Defining the rhetorical situation of a particular assignment quite precisely, such scales are commonly known as primary trait scales. Whereas a SFAS scale corresponds to a general assignment, a primary trait scale corresponds to a specific assignment. For example, a situation-free assignment might ask students to write a set of instructions for operating a household appliance, but, other than defining the rhetorical problem generally, few specifics might be given. The students might be allowed to choose the appliance and to define more explicitly for themselves such matters as author's role and conception of audience. On the other hand, a primary

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[2]Because it defines the role of the author for both autobiography and biography, in a sense the PNWS encompasses two assignment-specific scales. However, this is a mere technicality, for by deleting or ignoring the references to either autobiography or biography, separate scales can easily be created.

trait assignment would always define the entire rhetorical situation precisely, identifying the appliance and specifying the audience, purpose, and author's role in fairly definite terms (Lloyd-Jones, 1977; Spandel & Stiggins, 1980).

Although a primary trait scale can only be used with one quite focused assignment, its restricted scope has one important benefit. Given that the assignment limits legitimate student responses to a narrow range, scale developers are able to identify and describe the principal or "primary trait" contributing to the effect a successful piece has on an audience. This is more difficult to do in more open assignments where, because the assignment situation is not fixed, much greater variation in student writing occurs. In some primary trait scales, secondary traits are also defined along with the primary trait, but these generally do not specify sentence-level features such as syntax and mechanics (Spandel & Stiggins, 1980; Mullis, 1984).

A primary trait scale usually contains the writing instructions or "stimulus" as well as the descriptors for the primary and secondary traits. Though the number of quality levels may differ, primary trait scales often employ a four-point scale. Usually a "1" indicates the primary trait is absent, a "2" signals presence of the primary trait, a "3" indicates some proficiency or competence, and "4" indicates excellence. For example, in its primary trait task for children entitled "Children on a Boat," the National Assessment of Educational Progress identified one primary trait and five secondary traits. These are listed

below along with the assignment instructions and the level "4" descriptor for the primary trait (Mullis, 1976).

Primary Trait:

Emotive and consistent entry into the imaginary world of the picture

Secondary Traits:

Tense

Point of View

Dialogue

Fantasy

Insights

Assignment Instructions

Look carefully at the picture. These kids are having fun jumping on the overturned boat. Imagine you are one of the children in the picture. Or if you wish, imagine that you are someone standing nearby watching the children. Tell what is going on as he or she would tell it. Write as if you were telling this to a good friend, in a way that expresses strong feelings. Help your friend FEEL the experience too. Space is provided on the next three pages.

Level "4" Primary Trait Descriptor:

These papers are structurally whole. Loose ends have been tied up or cut off (although a strong paper without closure can be rated in this category). Papers are consistent. Narratives are well and evenly

developed or attitudes are expressed so a definite mood is created. You do "feel" the experience. The structure is unified and supported by imaginative and evocative details.

Scale development procedures

A writing scale is an instrument designed to help readers evaluate writing. A typical scale consists of a set of criteria defining the writing characteristics to be judged and some format for indicating the degree to which certain features are present in a piece of writing. Using a scale, a reader is directed to consider only those qualities specifically defined by the scale criteria. As a result, relying on a writing scale, a trained reader is guided to make judgments about writing which accord with standards set by the makers of the scale, a rating sheet of some kind often being used to record judgments made.

The standards on which writing scales are based essentially result from a consensus of individuals with special knowledge about writing. They are usually teachers or other expert judges of writing who, through discussion and agreement, translate their knowledge into descriptions of writing at several levels of proficiency. Intended for evaluators lacking the time or expertise to develop their own criteria, these descriptions are usually crafted with great care--the validity of any scale largely resting on their clarity and accuracy. While some of these scales are commercially available, many were only developed for use in particular writing programs (Lloyd-Jones, 1977; Stiggins, 1982).

Procedures for developing writing scales vary according to scale specificity, generic scale development requiring the least effort. While no standard description for constructing a generic scale exists, the procedures for doing so are described in general terms in a number of sources (Brown & Bailey, 1984; Diederich, 1974; Jacobs et al., 1981; Reid & O'Brien, 1984). Beginning with an effort to involve as many teachers as possible in the development of the scale, these usually consist of three stages.[3] In the first stage, the teachers involved identify the criteria to be included in the scale based on the curriculum objectives for which the scale is intended. Because these usually specify student skill with a wide range of writing, the criteria chosen are often broad categories like ideas, organization, expression, syntax, and mechanics. Then, relying on suggestions from instructors familiar with the curriculum, in the second stage participants write the main and other performance level descriptors for each scale category and draw up an initial version of the scale. This is circulated to a number of teachers for comment. Finally, after receiving feedback from these teachers, the final writing scale is drafted.

The procedures described above suggest that a generic scale can be developed by any group of teachers willing to meet and do the necessary

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[3]Involving a number of teachers is essential in the development of any scale--generic or assignment-specific--because numbers help produce a broad consensus concerning the scale criteria. Stiggins (1982) indicates this is important because teacher participation in selecting and defining the scale criteria "promotes understanding of and agreement with criteria and ultimately enhances...[scale] reliability" (p. 149).

work. The major commitment is one of time. Spandel and Stiggins (1980) indicate that two days should be allotted for developing such a scale--at least one day to identify the general scale traits and a second to draft the required descriptors. However, because numerous generic scales exist, developing a completely new scale may not be necessary. Published in teaching journals, freshman handbooks, and other sources, these scales may be used in their published form or adapted to suit particular course or curriculum needs. An example handbook scale of this type can be found in The Little, Brown Handbook by Schwegler and Aaron (1983). For ESL versions, see Brown and Bailey (1984), Jacobs et al. (1981), Mullen (1977), and Reid and O'Brien (1984).

In contrast to generic scales, assignment-specific scales are more difficult to develop. While detailed directions for constructing these scales do not exist, general descriptions are available. In the only known description for developing a SFAS scale, Cooper (1977), for example, outlines three essential steps.[4] Given the prior selection of an appropriate writing assignment and the recruitment of several interested teachers, the first step begins with the collection of a number of pieces of writing for which the scale is to be used. These should include both professional and student pieces. For example, if the scale is intended for a type of proposal writing, then a number of student examples from previous semesters as well as published proposals of this kind need to be found and reproduced. In addition, Cooper advises that participating

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[4]Cooper defines these scales as analytic scales.

teachers find several "critical, analytical, or theoretical treatises" (p. 14) on the mode in question. In the case of a particular kind of proposal, this requirement would probably be fulfilled by photocopying relevant sections in various technical writing handbooks.

Once the above material has been brought together, step two begins. In this phase, participating teachers begin reading and discussing the writing samples as well as the theoretical pieces, taking time to jot down features or qualities which seem to characterize the type of writing being examined. For a specific kind of proposal writing, this would include listing rhetorical criteria peculiar to this form of persuasive technical writing as well as sentence-level criteria. Gradually, through an inductive process, the teachers develop a working list of the most important features--criteria usually narrower in scope than those found in a generic scale. These are then tried out on original pieces of student writing to see if they indeed apply to the type of writing under study.

In the final stage, the teachers are directed to define each of the selected features in nontechnical language and to write parallel descriptors for the various quality levels chosen. With a completed scale in hand, the teachers then try out the new instrument on several student papers. While it is likely that most initial SFAS scales would need to be revised, Cooper does not mention this step in his description.

Procedures for developing a primary trait scale are described by Lloyd-Jones (1977), who suggests a four-stage approach. In the first stage, participating teachers are advised to select a writing assignment limited to a specific situation. For example, the assignment might be a

persuasive letter to a university official regarding a controversial parking regulation. Here teachers are told to keep two considerations in mind: First, the task must be interesting to students and, second, it must be within the range of their experience. It would be unfair, for example, to assign a writing task on urban sprawl to students from rural areas with little or no awareness of this problem.

In the second stage, the teachers need to examine the assignment in detail and to decide whether it elicits primarily expressive, persuasive, or explanatory writing (i.e., writing focusing on the writer, the audience, or the topic, respectively) or some combination of these. In the case of the letter to the university official noted above, the focus of the writing task is obviously persuasive and would require standard appeals typical of this mode. However, assuming that the official in question is a mature, educated individual, a rational description of the problem would also be appropriate. Thus, while mainly persuasive, papers on this topic would contain elements of explanatory writing as well.

Keeping these considerations in mind, in stage three, the teachers begin to develop hypotheses regarding writing on the chosen topic. To do this, they ask themselves what rhetorical traits would appear in the most successful papers. Over a period of time, several traits are usually identified. The one considered most important is generally selected as the primary trait. For example, if the task requires students to write a set of instructions for operating a lawnmower, the primary trait might be the ability to maximize operator safety through appropriate ordering of information. While not always retained in the final scale, the other

qualities are classified as secondary traits. Beginning with the primary trait, these features are then defined with great care for each quality level. The result is a set of descriptions which form the basis for a preliminary scale.

During the final stage, the initial scale version is revised and edited. To do this, the assignment is first given to a number of students and sample papers on the topic collected. These are read in order to assess the validity of earlier hypotheses regarding successful writing on the topic in question. After this analysis, wherever necessary, the scale descriptors and assignment instructions are revised to bring the scale into conformity with actual student performance. Then, after incorporating needed changes, a final version of the scale is produced.

The procedures described above for developing assignment-specific scales rest on two assumptions, the first being that writing teachers have the time to develop such scales. While it is impossible to specify the average time needed to devise an assignment-specific scale, a good estimate would be three to four days.[5] The second assumption implicit in procedures for developing assignment-specific scales is that teachers have the rhetorical expertise needed to develop such scales. No studies which directly test this premise have been conducted. However, in reviewing relevant literature, I found some evidence in at least one

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[5]Spandel and Stiggins (1980) give this estimate for developing a primary trait scale. No data are available for developing a SFAS scale, but it would probably require a similar amount of time.

study (Holdzkom et al., 1983) where 16 primary trait scales were developed by classroom teachers. While the teachers who constructed these scales were given prior scale development training, the rhetorical criteria in most of these scales are quite vague. In contrast, it is significant that the best assignment-specific scales were developed by groups containing at least one and sometimes several experts in the field of composition. Included here are the primary trait scales developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Mullis, 1976) as well as the Personal Narrative Writing Scale and the Dramatic Writing Scale (Cooper, 1977)--two scales which Cooper and several Buffalo area teachers developed for use in high school writing programs.[6]

There are presently between 20 and 30 assignment-specific scales. Most of these are primary trait scales (Holdzkom et al., 1983; Mullis, 1976). Only a handful are SFAS scales (Alpren, 1973; Cooper, 1977; Sager, 1973). Of the total, more than half were developed for elementary-level writing. Others, like the primary trait scales developed in the study reported by Holdzkom et al. (1983), are poorly constructed. None has been designed for ESL writing.[7] As a result, while some of the assignment-

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[6]The assessment of the relative quality of these scales is based on my own judgment, scale clarity and specificity being the evaluative criteria used. Part of the teachers' difficulty in constructing the primary trait scales reported in the study by Holdzkom et al. (1983) was that most worked alone rather than with other teachers. These scales can be found in Bebermeyer, Wright, and Holdzkom (1982).

[7]In ESL, there has been little interest in assignment-specific scales. Anderson (March, 1981), the only relevant citation found, gave a demonstration on primary trait scales at the 1981 TESOL Convention in Detroit. However, she has not published any findings regarding her work with primary trait scales.

specific scales available may be of immediate use to ESL writing teachers, it is likely most will not be very helpful.

Writing Scales: Instructional Applications

In teaching composition, writing scales are usually associated with evaluation. This view is understandable, since most writing scales used today were originally devised for assessment ends as diverse as student placement and diagnostic testing (Mullis, 1984). It is also the traditional view. In their 1963 summary of composition research findings, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, for example, speak of writing scales only in terms of their evaluative function. However, in recent years, several significant studies have shown that, besides their value as assessment tools, writing scales have instructional uses as well. In the following discussion, the use of writing scales is discussed from three instructional perspectives--assignment planning, writing instruction, and diagnostic feedback, the latter focusing on the use of scales as rating sheets or checklists and as heuristics for teacher comments. In each, the discussion includes a focus on the relative merits of generic and assignment-specific scales.

Scales and assignment planning

Most of what is known about assignment planning comes not from research but rather from experienced teachers who provide practical advice on how to plan and carry out effective writing assignments. Their suggestions encompass a wide range of matters extending from the teaching of discrete skills to the view that each assignment should be considered a

step in the social and intellectual development of the learner (Lindemann, 1982; Moffett, 1968). For all practical purposes, their recommendations for planning assignments focus on three broad concerns.

To begin with, writing teachers are advised to consider the main objectives of the assignment. This does not mean writing an often perfunctory statement of objectives at the head of a lesson plan the night before assigning a paper. Rather, it means having a clear idea well beforehand of the key elements or features making up a successful paper on the assigned topic regardless of how individual pieces vary in subject matter or approach. This certainly includes expectations relating to formal standards of correctness--matters such as format, syntax, and punctuation, which no writing teacher ought to neglect. However, a writing teacher also needs to have a firm grasp of the rhetorical features of each assignment, that is, the complex of characteristics which contribute to the success of a paper written in a given rhetorical framework. In a given assignment, a number of these features may be present. To avoid complicating the assignment, teachers are advised to focus their attention on the two or three deemed most important (Larson, 1981). Upon determining the major goals of the assignment, writing teachers need to consider the second important concern in assignment planning. That is, with the assignment criteria in mind, instructors must ask what specific skills in thinking and organizing will students need to perform in order to write a successful paper, and correspondingly, what classroom activities or tasks need to be assigned over various lessons to ensure that students are given a chance to practice required writing

skills before they begin to write (Larson, 1981; Lindemann, 1982). The third assignment planning consideration is how the assignment fits into the course as a whole. Given that writing teachers have or ought to have a set of overall goals when they begin a course, they need to be able to explain the position and reason for each assignment in the syllabus. Regarding each assignment, they need to ask: Does it help students advance toward the goals of the course? Did previous assignments give students the skills needed to succeed in the assignment? Will the assignment provide students with skills they will need in future assignments (Larson, 1981)?

For such assignment planning concerns as these, the use of a writing scale would appear useful. In that by design most scales used by classroom teachers break writing down into the major categories or features considered essential for success in writing, it seems reasonable that, while not a solution to all the problems of assignment planning, a writing scale might be a helpful heuristic for visualizing the writing skills needed in a given paper. However, because they are typically generic in design, most scales used for classroom purposes provide little concrete support for teachers needing to plan a given assignment. While detailing sentence-level matters important during the final editing phases of writing, such scales are too general to identify the rhetorical skills required by a particular paper.

While there has been no study comparing generic and assignment-specific scales, anecdotal evidence from studies employing assignment-specific scales support their use in assignment planning.

Sager (1973) reports that teachers using a scale designed for grade school creative story writing claimed it helped them define specific student needs and to think in more specific terms about instructional remedies. Similarly, Holdzkom et al. (1983) report that teachers using primary trait scales indicated they were able to clarify the purposes of instruction better and to plan more effective assignments. Teachers in the latter study also found that using primary trait scales helped them evaluate various writing assignments and to correct imbalances in course syllabi.

Scales and writing instruction

Once the goals of an assignment have been determined, the actual teaching of writing can begin. Apart from maintaining a view of the overall assignment, a writing teacher's major concern at the outset of instruction is to make the assignment objectives clear to students. Current pedagogical theory suggests that in any instructional context, student performance is enhanced if students have specific knowledge of the lesson objectives--knowledge preferably presented to them well before they are asked to perform a given task (Armstrong, Denton, & Savage, 1978). This theme is also stressed in composition instruction where experts recommend that writing criteria be made explicit to students at the beginning of an assignment (Beaven, 1977; Hillocks, 1986).

Traditional procedures for teaching the criteria of writing usually include some combination of oral explanation and the study of model pieces of writing. Often students are given a written assignment handout as well. An alternative procedure involves using scales or sets of criteria. A relatively recent classroom approach, scales rely to some extent on both

teacher explanations and model pieces of writing. However, whereas in traditional classrooms oral explanations and the study of models comprise the main foci of instruction, they are only relied on incidentally in instruction which uses scales (Hillocks, 1986).

In scale-based writing assignments, teachers typically begin by giving students an oral explanation of the assignment as well as a written handout. However, in contrast to traditional approaches, this explanation is only meant to be a brief introduction. It is immediately followed by the presentation of the assignment criteria through the use of scales. Depending on the criteria the instructor chooses to teach using this approach, the number of scales or sets of criteria employed may be one or several. Often in the form of checklist statements or questions detailing four levels of quality graded from three (Excellent) to zero (Poor), these scales or sets of criteria are usually introduced to students one at a time along with model pieces of writing which illustrate the qualities being examined.

To illustrate, let us assume a class has been assigned to write an imaginative story, the major criteria being elaboration, sequence, vivid/interesting imagery, sentence structure, and mechanics. Electing to teach elaboration first, the teacher presents to the class a fairly simple scale or checklist defining the characteristics for elaboration in imaginative story writing. Briefly explaining the purpose of this scale, the teacher then gives the students a model piece from a story illustrating exemplary use of elaboration. Telling the class the model rates a three for this feature, the teacher asks students to compare the

level three descriptor with the model and point out reasons why it is an excellent example of elaboration. Guided by the written criteria, the students analyze the model and discuss these reasons as a class with minimal teacher prompting. The teacher then follows the same procedure for introducing the criteria for levels two, one, and finally zero, making clear the connection between the models and their corresponding descriptors. Depending on the feature being taught and student familiarity with the use of scales, this entire procedure will take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes to complete (Sager, 1973; Clifford, 1978).

Once the graded criteria for elaboration have been introduced, the teacher's next step is to break the class up into small groups, giving each several model pieces which they are required to examine and rate. After discussing and rating several pieces in terms of elaboration, each group may then be asked to use elaboration to revise one of the poorer models. Or, this revision task may be assigned to individual students as homework. During subsequent lessons, the criteria for sequence and vivid/interesting imagery are introduced to students in a similar manner. After giving the students a chance to rate and revise model pieces of writing for these features, the teacher then directs the students to write an imaginative story of their own using the sets of criteria learned in previous lessons as guides. While writing their stories, each is asked to share draft versions with classmates or the teacher who provide feedback regarding the rhetorical criteria learned in previous lessons. Then, before students have written their final drafts, the teacher may introduce the assignment criteria for sentence structure and mechanics along with

relevant models to be examined, rated, and revised as before. The focus on these features comes late in the assignment, impressing on students the current view in composition research that concern for sentence-level matters should be left to the final editing stages of writing (Sager, 1973; Hillocks, 1986).

While not a panacea for all the problems faced by writing instructors, using scales or sets of criteria to teach the criteria of writing has several advantages over traditional methods. The most important advantage is providing students with fairly clear, attainable goals. In ordinary classrooms, students are often confused by teacher explanations of the assignment criteria even though model pieces of writing are employed to illustrate particular features. This is because as learning cues, teacher explanations and models are often vague and abstract. That is, explanations may describe and models may show what a final writing product ought to be, but neither provides much guidance for producing an original piece. In contrast, when the criteria of writing are taught using scales, students are provided with a more concrete, operational understanding of the assignment objectives. Rather than being uncertain about the criteria or unsure how to employ them in their writing, students who have learned the assignment criteria using scales learn that writing an assigned paper, while demanding, is nevertheless a manageable task. Following clearly defined procedures, they have studied specific writing features one by one with peers in class--low-risk situations which help students feel more confident when later composing the actual paper. Moreover, in contrast to models which are often

difficult to emulate or may short-circuit the composing process of some writers entirely by causing them to inflexibly structure their writing on a model, scale criteria learned in class and used to revise select model pieces are more easily applied to a student's own writing. As a result, using these criteria, students are less likely to rely on the frustrating "what-next" approach to composing, which research suggests is often used by inexperienced writers. Instead, knowing the assignment goals and being familiar with procedures needed to reach these goals, students are able to employ a "means-ends" approach to writing--a strategy characteristic of competent writers (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Hillocks, 1986).

The use of scales to teach the criteria of writing also has other advantages, one being an apparent increase in student motivation. While studies comparing traditional approaches and the use of scales for teaching the assignment criteria have not focused on this factor per se, there is some evidence to suggest that students are more motivated to write when scales are used. One reason for this may be that students appreciate having the support which scales provide. However, another reason is that scales help make instruction more dynamic. Whereas in listening to the teacher or in examining models, students in ordinary classrooms tend to be passive recipients of information, in instruction involving scales, they use and manipulate information actively. This seems to result in greater student interest (Hillocks, 1986). In a study using scales to teach the criteria of creative story writing to sixth-graders, Sager (1973) notes that "Even the most reluctant students

became eager, accurate, and vociferous judges. It was not unusual for heated debates over scoring to be continued on the playground or in the lunchroom long after the language arts period had ended" (p. 6). Likewise, in a study focusing on the use of primary trait scales in a variety of public school grades, Holdzkom et al. (1983) indicate that students generally liked using the scales teachers had devised and that even problem students showed more interest in doing writing assignments.

Finally, scales offer the advantage of reducing the need for teacher explanation. In traditional classrooms, teachers usually spend a great deal of time explaining the assignment criteria or what students should be looking for in the model pieces of writing being examined (Hillocks, 1986). As a consequence, teachers in these classrooms often assume a dominant informational role, filling class time with "teacher talk." As noted earlier, students in these classrooms are usually passive spectators rather than active participants. In contrast, in classrooms employing the use of scales, teachers need not speak as much. Instead, guided by the descriptors for the features being examined, students tend to teach each other. Although the teacher is always present to referee student discussions about model pieces under study, she or he is a facilitator rather than an all-knowing authority (Hillocks, 1986).[8]

[8]If the use of scales is more effective for teaching writing than traditional approaches, then this should be possible to verify. However, few studies have specifically compared scale and traditional treatments and, as a group, these are difficult to interpret. Focusing only on scales and models, Hillocks (1986) attempts to overcome this problem with an innovative statistical analysis of six research studies involving the study of models and seven others involving the use of scales. From this "meta-analysis," he concludes that scale treatments are superior to the study of models in improving student writing ability.

Given these advantages for using scales or sets of criteria for teaching writing, the question remains as to whether generic or assignment-specific scales are better. The former, in detailing sentence-level matters specifically, help instructors teach assignment objectives relating to syntax and mechanics. In fact, using a generic scale, Clifford (1978) successfully taught the criteria for appropriate sentence-structure to remedial college freshmen. However, it is difficult to conceive how for rhetorical matters a generic scale could always be used effectively. While Clifford also employed generic scale descriptors for support and organization, reporting an improvement in student ability in each, differences in course assignments often make the use of such general criteria impossible. For example, rhetorically a persuasive letter-to-the-editor, a paper defining a concept such as poverty, and a set of instructions for operating a camera are quite different from each other.

For teaching the objectives of such varied assignments, rhetorical criteria taken from assignment-specific scales would appear to be more effective. This cannot be verified, however, because assignment-specific and generic scales have never been compared for their potential for teaching different rhetorical objectives. Only anecdotal evidence from studies employing assignment-specific scales supports their use for teaching the rhetorical criteria of different assignments. These studies generally report that students liked using assignment-specific scales because they set out in a positive fashion the specific criteria for good papers and that teachers generally felt student writing had improved.

Significantly, the two studies cited earlier concerning increases in student motivation when scales were used to teach the criteria of writing both employed assignment-specific scales (Sager, 1973; Holdzkom et al., 1983; Alpren, 1973; Coleman, 1982).

Scales and diagnostic feedback

Besides the role writing scales can play in assignment planning and their use at the outset of instruction in teaching the criteria of writing, scales also can provide diagnostic feedback to students during the later stages of an assignment. Research suggests that traditional forms of written feedback which do not rely on scales are often ineffective (Sommers, 1982; Hillocks, 1986). This is largely because of the vague, abstract character of the comments and correction symbols used. While scales cannot solve all the problems associated with giving feedback, they seem to afford a means for improving the quality and consistency of this feedback. In the discussion which follows, two principal feedback modes of writing scales are discussed--their use as rating sheets or checklists and their use as heuristics for teacher comments. In each section, the relative merits of generic and assignment-specific scales are discussed.

Rating sheets or checklists To provide students with information regarding the strengths and weaknesses in their writing, many teachers employ the use of a rating sheet or checklist. Containing the most important assignment criteria, these rating forms are sometimes complete writing scales detailing several levels of quality for each scale category or feature. An example is the ESL Composition Profile, which contains

four quality levels for five different categories. Teachers using scales such as the Profile to provide feedback are advised to underline or circle scale criteria in order to communicate judgments about writing to students (Hughey et al., 1983). In contrast to the use of complete scales, other rating forms often list only the most important writing criteria in a series of statements which can be answered yes or no. Because they are simpler in design than complete scales, learning cue theory suggests these latter rating forms are easier for students to understand (Hillocks, 1986). However, this has never been verified. The rating sheet shown below from Cooper (1977) is an example of this simpler scale.

	Yes	No	
Content I.	____	____	1. Ideas themselves are insightful.
	____	____	2. Ideas are creative or original.
	____	____	3. Ideas are rational or logical.
	____	____	4. Ideas are expressed with clarity.
Organization II.	____	____	5. There is a thesis.
	____	____	6. Order of thesis idea is followed throughout the essay.
	____	____	7. Thesis is adequately developed.
	____	____	8. Every paragraph is relevant to the thesis.
	____	____	9. Each paragraph has a controlling idea.
	____	____	10. Each paragraph is developed with relevant and concrete details.
	____	____	11. The details that are included are well-ordered.
Mechanics III.	____	____	12. There are many misspellings.
	____	____	13. There are serious punctuation errors.
	____	____	14. Punctuation errors are excessive.
	____	____	15. There are errors in the use of verbs.
	____	____	16. There are errors in use of pronouns.
	____	____	17. There are errors in use of modifiers.
	____	____	18. There are distracting errors in word usage.
	____	____	19. The sentences are awkward.

To date, only one study has been done which supports the use of a rating sheet or checklist for diagnostic purposes. This was a study by Stanton (1974) who compared groups receiving feedback in the form of written commentary, a checklist, teacher instruction, and questions and oral feedback. His study showed no significant differences in writing quality gain among the four feedback modes studied, thus offering no evidence to support rating sheet feedback. However, Stanton did find that a checklist helped teachers give more reliable feedback.

There has been no study comparing the use of generic and assignment-specific scales for diagnostic ends. Because sentence-level criteria may be defined fairly specifically for either scale type, one would expect both would prove useful for indicating student success or difficulty with matters like spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. In the study by Stanton (1974) noted above, teachers used a generic scale checklist to point out such features. No similar study can be found for assignment-specific scales, but Cooper (1977) reports that the Personal Narrative Writing Scale discussed earlier has been used for a range of feedback purposes in the classroom. However, for most writing assignments, it is difficult to see how a generic scale could effectively provide feedback on the rhetorical or arrangement criteria peculiar to a specific type of writing. Although the developers of one generic scale, the ESL Composition Profile, state "The Profile signals exactly what successes students have achieved with their writing and exactly what they need to learn" (Hughey et al., 1983, p. 151), they do not substantiate this claim.

No study has focused on the quality of rhetorical feedback from assignment-specific scales. However, there is some evidence to support their use. Providing anecdotal information, Holdzkom et al. (1983), for example, indicate that teachers liked using primary trait scales to give feedback on first drafts because of the emphasis these scales place on purpose, audience, and rhetorical situation. Moreover, in an interpretation of a study by Beach (1979) which employed a scale defining five criteria, Hillocks (1986) speculates that the higher student writing gains for one feature--support--can in part be attributed to the fact that support seems to be defined more specifically than the other features.[9]

Scales as heuristics for teacher comments There is no known description of the use of writing scales as heuristics for teacher comments. However, this procedure, familiar to teachers who use writing scales, is fairly straightforward. A teacher employing a writing scale for this purpose reviews the scale criteria periodically when reading student papers to be reminded of the major features which might require comment. While these might be circled or underlined on the scale or checklist being used, comments are sometimes necessary to explain or clarify these criteria further. Used in this way, a writing scale can assist the teacher in two ways. First, because a writing scale breaks writing down into the major features considered essential for success, a writing scale can help teachers make focused, draft-specific comments

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[9]The scale used in the study by Beach (1979) is a generic scale. However, the possibility that specificity and criteria effectiveness are linked supports the use of assignment-specific scales for diagnostic ends.

which research suggests are more effective than comments on a given paper covering a wide range of issues (Sommers, 1982; Hillocks, 1986). A teacher using a writing scale would thus be aided in making comments on rhetorical matters on initial drafts and comments on editing in later drafts. Second, in pointing out important writing criteria, a writing scale can help teachers make specific comments. In noting particular strengths and weaknesses in a paper, research indicates specific comments help students write better subsequent drafts. In contrast, vague or general comments often confuse students by not giving them clear cues or directions for revision (Sommers, 1982; Hillocks, 1986).

There have been no studies comparing the use of generic and assignment-specific scales as heuristics for teacher comments.[10] Thus, definitive statements concerning the relative merits of either cannot be made. However, in that assignment-specific scales detail the important criteria for a particular type of writing quite specifically, it seems obvious that they would be better heuristics for teacher comments. While comments focusing on sentence-level matters would probably not differ a great deal between the two, assignment-specific scales would likely help teachers make more specific, focused comments on important rhetorical and organizational matters. Anecdotal evidence reported by Holdzkom et al. (1983) suggests teachers using primary trait scales found this to be true.

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[10] Odell (1979) recommends that such a study be done comparing the effect of feedback from using analytic and primary trait scales, "feedback" presumably meaning all forms of feedback—not just written commentary. By "analytic scales," Odell means scales which assume that a piece of writing can be assigned a total score made up of part scores.

However, while referring to the use of these scales for "responding appropriately to ideas expressed in the first drafts" (p. 16), this study does not specifically refer to written commentary.

Summary

The relevant literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that assignment-specific scales can be constructed. However, they may be difficult for classroom teachers to develop. Several studies suggest that assignment-specific scales also have instructional uses. There is fairly good evidence, for example, that they can be effectively used to teach the criteria of writing to students. There is more limited evidence indicating they may be useful for assignment planning. Only scant evidence supports their use for diagnostic ends.

CHAPTER III. PROCEDURES

The following four-part discussion describes the procedures used in the two phases of this study. The first part provides biographical information on the eight ESL writing teachers who were asked to participate. The second part details the approach used to develop an assignment-specific writing scale--the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (CCR scale). The third part explains the procedures used to gather data on the reactions of ESL teachers and students to the CCR scale. Finally, the last part describes the procedures employed to analyze the comments and correction markings which several ESL writing teachers made on 50 comparison/contrast reports.

Biographical Information on Participating Teachers

Extending over a three-month period, this investigation required the participation of several ESL writing teachers. In all, eight teachers volunteered to participate, most contributing from one to four hours of their time. Biographical data on these teachers are presented in Table 1. Because I was also a participant, this table also includes information on myself.

Scale Development Procedure

During the course of this investigation, an assignment-specific writing scale--the CCR scale--was developed for the comparison/contrast report assignment which ESL graduate students at Iowa State University are often assigned to write in a course known as English 100D. The assignment requires students to write a technical report on a problem in their field

Table 1. Biographical information on the ESL writing teachers who participated in this study, May, 1986[a]

Teacher	Graduate coursework	Number semesters teaching writing
1	Completed	12
2	Completed	6
3	In process	2
4	In process	4
5	In process	5
6	Completed	6
7	Completed	ca. 25
8	Completed	ca. 18-20

[a]This group consisted of five women and three men ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties. To help ensure anonymity, no data on sex or age are given.

in which they weigh two possible solutions and recommend the better one. Students are told to direct the report to a superior (e.g., a major professor or work supervisor) who needs professional advice on the problem in question. The standard assignment also requires that the report be preceded by a transmittal letter and an abstract.

In developing an assignment-specific scale, a major consideration is which scale model to use. As noted in the previous chapter, two choices are possible, assignments allowing students to select their own topic corresponding to situation-free assignment-specific (SFAS) scales and those restricted to one situation corresponding to primary trait scales.

While requiring students to use the comparison/contrast report form, the comparison/contrast report assignment allows students to choose their own topic and subject matter. Thus, from the outset, it was obvious that the proposed instrument would have to be a SFAS scale.

After deciding on the SFAS scale design, I initially intended to develop the new scale using the procedures outlined by Cooper (1977). However, because his approach requires a considerable time commitment from participating teachers--far larger than ESL writing teachers at Iowa State University could reasonably be expected to make, an alternative method was adopted. Retaining some features recommended by Cooper, this approach consisted of two stages.[1] In the first or data collection stage, the assignment criteria on which to base the new scale were initially determined by interviewing seven ESL teachers who have taught the comparison/contrast report assignment in English 100D. This group consisted of five teachers who had completed their graduate coursework and two teachers in the process of doing so (teachers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Table 1). Each teacher was asked to prepare for the interview by reading an exemplary comparison/contrast report from the course, a copy of the standard assignment handout, and a list of questions to be asked and interviewed regarding the objectives of the comparison/contrast report

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[1]Besides Cooper's method, working alone I also attempted to develop an assignment-specific scale by analyzing the comments which teachers had written on a number of comparison/contrast reports. This procedure was useful in identifying a number of scale criteria. However, lacking the advice of other teachers, I found it impossible to decide which criteria should be emphasized in the proposed scale. Here a contributing factor was the quality of comments focusing on rhetorical matters and special organizational features. These were few and often vague.

assignment. These taped sessions lasted from 30 to 45 minutes each. All pertinent comments were transcribed onto note cards for later analysis (see Appendix B for the comparison/contrast report assignment handout and Appendix C for the list of interview questions).

Supplementing the data gathered from these interviews was an analysis of discussions focusing on comparison/contrast arguments found in four standard composition textbooks, a procedure adopted because of Cooper's (1977) suggestion that theoretical reading be made a part of the scale development process. Because participating teachers could not be expected to read this material, I reviewed the relevant sections in these texts myself. As shown in Table 2, the first two works were written for first-year college composition courses, the comparison/contrast paper being a conventional assignment at this level. The last two texts shown were written specifically for technical writing courses and were consulted because of the technical nature of the comparison/contrast report.

Following these data collection efforts, the second stage involving the actual development of the proposed scale began. Here, while several of the participating teachers at times supplied advice, it was necessary

Table 2. Textbooks consulted during the development of the CCR scale

Patterns for college writing: A rhetorical guide and reader. Kirszner & Mandell (1983)
Strategies for rhetoric. Tibbetts & Tibbetts (1979)
Writing scientific papers and reports. Jones (1971)
Technical English: Writing, reading, and speaking. Pickett & Laster (1984)

for me to largely construct the new scale by myself. To do this, I first reviewed the teachers' statements regarding the assignment criteria given during the interview sessions. By analyzing these statements, certain patterns of teacher preferences gradually became apparent and were recorded in lists of potential scale criteria. These criteria were then compared with information gathered from the theoretical reading noted above and an initial version of the scale drafted. Incorporating the teachers' suggestions regarding scale format and the categories to include, this draft was then circulated to each of the seven teachers interviewed earlier. These teachers were asked to comment on and suggest ways it might be revised (see Appendix D for the Scale Development Letter dated April 28, 1986). For the most part, the seven teachers were favorably disposed toward the scale, suggesting only a few minor changes which were subsequently introduced into the final version.

The new scale--the CCR scale, a copy of which can be found in Appendix E, contained six categories, each weighted on a 100-point scale as shown in Table 3. These categories represented the overall objectives

Table 3. CCR scale categories and category weightings

Content	25
Organization	25
Vocabulary and Expression	15
Grammar	25
Format	5
Mechanics	5
Total	100

of the comparison/contrast report assignment. Because a decision had to be made about the number of performance levels to include under each category, various alternatives were considered before finally deciding on five--Excellent to Good, Good to Average, Adequate to Fair, Marginal to Poor, and Unacceptable, a number chosen in order to make the levels roughly correspond to the standard grade levels of A to F. The new scale was printed on both sides of a single rating sheet. I chose this design to emphasize, in format at least, the idea that writing is a process, side 1 being the initial stages of writing (Content and Organization) and side 2 the later stages (Vocabulary and Expression, Grammar, Format, and Mechanics).

Writing Scale Evaluation

In an effort to determine how ESL teachers and students might react to an assignment-specific scale, the CCR scale was used, rated, and commented on by representatives of both groups in three separate sessions. Constituting the main data collection effort of this study, these sessions yielded both numerical data and relevant commentary.

In the sessions involving teachers, six ESL teachers participated--five in the main session and the sixth in a separate session on the following day. Among the seven teachers interviewed earlier when the CCR scale was being developed, these individuals had each taught the comparison/contrast assignment at least twice, the group as a whole consisting of four teachers who had completed their graduate coursework and two teachers in the process of doing so (teachers 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Table 1).

Each session lasted two hours and was divided into a reading period and a discussion period. In each reading period, the participants were asked to read four comparison/contrast reports of varying quality written by students in English 100D. Typed transcripts of the originals, these reports were read, evaluated, and scored by the teachers using the CCR scale for one pair of reports and the ESL Composition Profile for the other pair, the idea being that prior use of an assignment-specific and a generic scale would help make the discussion period to follow more fruitful.

The four reports, A, B, C, and D, were read in a manner designed to vary the participants' use of these scales, the intent being to counteract potential bias against either scale based on the papers read. To do this, the six teachers were divided into two groups, Group 1 and Group 2, each composed of two teachers who had completed their graduate coursework and one teacher in the process of doing so, the lone teacher in the separate session being a member of the latter group. Group 1 members read and scored reports A and B using the Profile and reports C and D using the CCR scale. For Group 2, the evaluation procedure was reversed.

Due to the special format chosen, each 70-minute reading period followed a rather complex set of procedures. Each participant received a copy of the standard comparison/contrast report handout given to students in English 100D, a CCR scale rating sheet, a Profile rating sheet, and two paper folders. The latter, here designated Folder I and Folder II, contained for each group the items shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Contents of Folder I and Folder II used during the two reading sessions

	Group 1	Group 2
Folder I:	Directions sheet	Directions sheet
	Report A	Report A
	Report B	Report B
	2 Profile rating sheets	2 CCR scale rating sheets
	1 Teacher Questionnaire	1 Teacher Questionnaire
Folder II:	Directions sheet	Directions sheet
	Report C	Report C
	Report D	Report D
	2 CCR scale rating sheets	2 Profile rating sheets
	1 Teacher Questionnaire	1 Teacher Questionnaire

Before the teachers opened the folders they were given a few minutes to reacquaint themselves with the assignment by reading the handout and also to examine the two scales. Then, beginning with Folder I, the six were instructed to complete the tasks outlined in the Directions for Teachers sheet included in each folder, taking 30 minutes to complete Folder I and the next 30 minutes to complete Folder II. Each teacher was requested to take the first 10 minutes to evaluate and score the top report and the second 10 minutes for the second report using the rating sheets provided. Then, having completed these tasks, the teacher was asked to spend the final 10 minutes rating and commenting on the scale via a questionnaire. This questionnaire solicited teacher opinion by means of eight Likert scale items and also contained space for written comments. (See Appendix F for a copy of both the Directions for Teachers sheet and

Teacher Questionnaire included in each folder. This appendix also contains scoring information for each teacher under Scoring Results.)

Following the completion of each reading period, the teachers were invited to participate in a 45-minute discussion period focusing on the use of writing scales in ESL composition and the possible value assignment-specific scales might have in such a program. Taped for later transcription, the discussions on both days were fairly free and open-ended, guided only by the six general questions shown below:

1. Is it valuable to use a writing scale in ESL composition? Why or why not?
2. What do you think of the general format of the two scales used?
3. Can a writing scale help a teacher make more specific comments on student papers? If so, how?
4. For a particular assignment, is it valuable or worthwhile to use a specific scale like the CCR scale? Why or why not?
5. Can an assignment-specific writing scale be used by students as a guide while they are revising an initial draft of a paper? Why or why not?
6. In terms of the effectiveness of an ESL writing program and the amount of communication among teachers regarding objectives, which approach in the long run produces better results, relying on generic scales for all assignments or having groups of teachers develop their own writing scales or checklists for specific assignments?

In order to find out how students as well as teachers reacted to the new scale, 12 ESL students participated in the third session. These students, enrolled in a spring semester, 1986, section of English 100D, had previously been instructed to revise their comparison/contrast report drafts using the CCR scale as a guide. Asked to rate and comment on their use of the CCR scale, they were given a special questionnaire designed for this purpose. The student questionnaire contained different Likert scale items but was otherwise similar to the form used by the teachers and required approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete (see Appendix G for a copy of the Student Questionnaire). Because I was also the English 100D instructor for this section, the students were carefully informed beforehand that their responses and comments would under no circumstances affect their grade in the course. To ensure confidentiality, questionnaires were submitted anonymously.

Analysis of Teacher Comments and Correction Markings

In an effort to assess whether the comments made on student papers by teachers using the ESL Composition Profile adequately explain or clarify assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the Profile, 50 comparison/contrast reports written during fall semester, 1985, were collected from six ESL teachers who taught English 100D that semester. The intent was to analyze the comments and correction markings found on these papers. These six teachers included three teachers who had completed their graduate coursework and three teachers who were in the

process of doing so (teachers 1 through 6 in Table 1).[2] The number of reports loaned by a single teacher ranged from four to 13. These reports, coming as they did from files of unclaimed papers, did not constitute a random sample. Nevertheless, both in the academic focus and in the native languages of their authors, these 50 papers were considered to be fairly representative of the 90 comparison/contrast reports written in English 100D during fall semester, 1985, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Each of the papers collected conformed to the standard English 100D comparison/contrast report assignment, containing a transmittal letter, an abstract, and the report itself, the latter being a technical discussion focusing on a problem in the student's field (see assignment handout in Appendix B). In addition, attached to each paper was an ESL Composition Profile rating sheet filled out by the teacher. Because the report proper constituted the central task of the assignment and because teachers scored papers and often wrote on the Profile while evaluating student work, both were examined for teacher comment and correction marking data, a comment being defined as a written remark of one or more words and a correction marking as an overt teacher correction of an error or a correction symbol employed to point out such an error. Because the transmittal letters and abstracts are separate and peripheral parts of the assignment, no such data were gathered from these.

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[2]The professional status of these teachers during fall semester, 1985, was the same as cited in Table 1 for May, 1986. The only difference was that each had one semester less experience teaching writing.

Table 5. Correspondence of the collected comparison/contrast reports written during fall semester, 1985, to the entire corpus of these reports in terms of the academic focus of their student authors

Academic area	Percent of students writing the collected reports	Percent of all students enrolled in English 100D
Humanities/Education	36.0	33.3
Math/Physical Sciences	22.0	20.0
Life Sciences	24.0	24.5
Engineering	18.0	22.2
Totals	100.0	100.0

Table 6. Correspondence of the collected comparison/contrast reports written during fall semester, 1985, to the entire corpus of these reports in terms of the native languages of their student authors

Language	Percent of students writing the collected reports	Percent of all students enrolled in English 100D
Chinese	52.0	45.6
Korean	28.0	24.5
Arabic	10.0	10.0
Spanish	6.0	4.4
Other	4.0	15.5
Totals	100.0	100.0

Whether written on the Profile rating sheet or the report itself, teacher comments and correction markings on each report were recorded on a special form which made examination of the comment and marking data from a single report easier.[3] These forms, numbering 50 in all, each contained a photocopy of the actual rating sheet used as well as a section for comments written on the corresponding report. Each of these latter comments was transcribed exactly and given a brief description clarifying its meaning and explaining the context in which it was made. However, in contrast to teacher comments, the correction markings, focusing as a group almost entirely on sentence-level matters, were generally not transcribed. This was mainly because the focus of this analysis was on rhetorical criteria. Instead, the correction markings found were merely tallied in a special section of the form. Finally, to help resolve later questions concerning the comment approaches employed, a photocopy of each report was retained.

The 157 comments on these reports were examined for how well they explained the assignment criteria not adequately defined in the Profile. As a result, because generic scales like the Profile only describe rhetorical criteria in general terms, this analysis focused on comments concerned with these matters. To do this, the 50 data forms were grouped

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[3]Because this analysis focused on how well the written commentary of teachers clarifies and explains the criteria found in the Profile, diagnostic feedback involving the underlining or circling of scale criteria was excluded from this analysis. While such feedback can point out scale criteria, it cannot explain or clarify these criteria. Four of the six teachers underlined or circled scale criteria a total of 71 times on 20 of the 50 Profile sheets.

according to teacher and then for each teacher arranged in numerical order according to the Profile score received for the entire assignment. Then, the comments on each data form were classified according to comment focus using a classification scheme based on the categories chosen for the CCR scale. These are shown in Table 7 along with the category Praise Only for comments only giving a general signal of praise like "Good" or "Excellent."

Table 7. Categories employed to classify the teacher comments found on the collected comparison/contrast reports

Content
Organization
Vocabulary and Expression
Grammar
Format
Mechanics
Praise Only

Categorizing the 157 comments proved to be a relatively straightforward task, most of the comments clearly falling into one of the indicated categories. In fact, comments from the Profile rating sheets were often written in the white space reserved for specific categories such as organization or mechanics. However, a few borderline cases occurred. Falling mainly between the categories for content, and vocabulary and expression, these comments were classified by examining the

photocopied text of the report in question and deciding whether the comment focused on mainly a sentence-level concern or whether in rhetorical terms the comment focused on a broader, meaning-related matter. For example, one teacher used the comment "meaning unclear" in two different reports. In one case, this comment was written adjacent to a lengthy, awkward clause which the teacher had also marked with parentheses. As a result, here "meaning unclear" was classified as focusing on vocabulary and expression. However, the other use of this phrase occurred in the introduction of a report in conjunction with an important qualifying statement the writer had not clarified adequately. Because essential information was missing, here the comment "meaning unclear" was classified as having an evident content or meaning-related focus (see Teacher Comments in Appendix H where all 157 comments are listed according to teacher and report).

After categorizing all the comments, an attempt was made to assess the degree to which the teachers' comments and correction markings clarified comparison/contrast report assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the ESL Composition Profile. This was done in two stages.

Stage one: In this stage the 157 comments were analyzed as a corpus of responses to specific student texts. Because the Profile defines sentence-level features fairly specifically but does not define rhetorical criteria as well, it was considered best to analyze the effectiveness of sentence-level and rhetorical comments separately. To do this, the corpus of comments was divided into two broad comment groups--sentence-level and rhetorical comments. Because they focused primarily on sentence-level

matters, the comments categorized as vocabulary and expression, grammar, format, and mechanics comments were assigned to the former. Because they were mainly concerned with rhetorical issues, the comments categorized as content and organization comments were assigned to the latter. In the analysis, the sentence-level comments were compared in a general way to the sentence-level criteria included in the Profile to determine the extent to which they clarified and explained these matters as well as sentence-level features not cited in the Profile. Because they focused primarily on sentence-level matters such as syntax and mechanics, the teachers' correction markings were considered in this analysis. In the analysis of rhetorical comments, those on content and organizational issues were compared in a general way to the rhetorical criteria outlined in the Profile to determine the degree to which they clarified and explained assignment criteria for these matters only vaguely outlined in this generic scale. In this analysis very few exemplary comments on content and organization were found.

Stage two: In this stage an attempt was made to determine whether teacher failure to respond to specific rhetorical problems may have contributed to the lack of exemplary comments on content and organizational issues. To do this, the photocopied reports were examined for the presence or absence of four important assignment criteria not specifically cited in the ESL Composition Profile. Since lack of time made it impossible to employ a panel of trained readers for this purpose, I performed this analysis myself. The four rhetorical features of interest were the following.

1. The problem addressed in the report and the purpose of the report are stated clearly. The technical report form on which the comparison/contrast report assignment is based requires that the problem addressed in such a report as well as its purpose be clearly outlined in the introduction (Huckin & Olsen, 1983).
2. The report contains claim statements at the beginning of paragraphs or subsections in the discussion section. These claim statements which are followed with supporting arguments regarding the comparisons being made help busy managerial readers skim such reports for the information they need (Huckin & Olsen, 1983).
3. The two solutions are discussed in a meaningful manner. To be meaningful, a comparison/contrast argument must show there is a common basis for the comparison being made. For example, if two machines are being compared for productivity, they must be compared for criteria they have in common. To evaluate each according to different factors would not result in a meaningful comparison (Kirszner & Mandell, 1983).
4. The report details the pattern of development to be pursued in the report either in the introduction or at the beginning of the discussion section. By providing information about what to expect in such a report, an initial statement detailing the pattern of development to be pursued helps busy managerial readers read more efficiently (Huckin & Olsen, 1983; Jones, 1971).

While reading the reports contributed by each teacher, I noted the number of times the above features were absent. This information was then compared to the corpus of comment data to determine the number of times each teacher responded to these rhetorical errors with error-specific comments. In this analysis I referred to report photocopies when I was unsure of the placement of particular comments and excluded those which were vague. Even though written in response to identified errors, such comments were not considered to be error-specific. Teacher experience and performance in responding to these rhetorical problems with error-specific comments were then compared to see if a correlation between the two might exist.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section contains the research findings gathered in this study and is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the problems encountered during the development of the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (CCR scale). The second part presents questionnaire information gathered from the teachers who participated in this study. The third part summarizes teacher commentary during the two 45-minute discussion periods. The fourth part provides questionnaire data from the 12 ESL students who were asked about the CCR scale. Finally, the last part contains the results from the analysis I made of the comments and correction markings found on the 50 comparison/contrast reports collected. The second section contains a discussion of these results. The four questions which this study set out to answer were the following:

1. Are current procedures for developing assignment-specific scales workable? Is it realistic to expect that ESL teachers can develop their own assignment-specific scales? Why or why not?
2. How do teachers in one ESL composition program react to an assignment-specific scale? Do they find such a scale acceptable? Why or why not?
3. How do ESL composition students react to an assignment-specific writing scale? Do they find such a scale understandable, helpful, and easy to use? Why or why not?

4. Is the assumption teachers hold regarding the efficacy of oral explanations and written comments to explain the criteria of a particular assignment valid? Why or why not?

Results

Comments on the development of the CCR scale

Serious difficulties were encountered in developing the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (CCR scale), a major problem stemming from the procedures Cooper (1977) outlines for developing a situation-free assignment-specific (SFAS) scale. The main difficulty was that these directions were vague. For example, while Cooper notes that during the development of such a scale participants need to list features which characterize the type of writing being examined, he never defines or specifies what he means by the term "feature" (pp. 14-15). Presumably, he intended this word to mean special rhetorical criteria (as well as sentence-level qualities) peculiar to the type of writing in question, but he does not state this. In addition, while he describes a general procedure for generating lists of features, this description provides little explicit guidance for teachers wanting to develop a SFAS scale. As scale editor, I found these directions confusing and found that I had to rely on my own intuition more than I would have liked.

The assumption that ESL writing teachers have the time needed to develop such scales proved to be another stumbling block. Although a number of teachers expressed interest in this project, it was obvious from the outset that most teachers would not have the time to participate if Cooper's procedures were strictly followed. The teachers who did

participate each contributed about an hour of their time, but this amount fell far short of the commitment needed to develop a good SFAS scale. As a result, an alternate scale development procedure had to be adopted. The approach finally employed allowed for teacher participation but made it difficult to achieve a true consensus regarding the scale criteria. For example, while each teacher was interviewed concerning the comparison/contrast report assignment, there were no group sessions. This meant as scale editor, I had to resolve conflicting opinions about the criteria myself. Though I was able to consult with individual teachers, at times I suspected my decisions were biased. Moreover, due to lack of time, the teachers were not adequately prepared for the interview sessions. While they were able to read one student comparison/contrast report beforehand, it was impossible to require them to read professional examples or theoretical pieces on the comparison/contrast report form. It is perhaps partly for this reason that many of their interview comments about the assignment criteria were vague.

A third difficulty was the teachers' apparent lack of rhetorical expertise. Though there were exceptions--teacher 8, for example, being quite knowledgeable, most of the teachers interviewed had difficulty conceiving of rhetorical features in specific terms. For example, several teachers felt that categories like content and organization would not differ much from one assignment to the next. Here, referring to organization, one teacher said "organization for the comparison/contrast paper is no different from any other...organization is organization." Teachers expressed such views in spite of the fact that at the beginning

of the interviews, each was given time to examine the criteria in an example SFAS scale. To some degree, this explains why, with the exception of the format category, the categories in the CCR scale are identical to those in the ESL Composition Profile.

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, an assignment-specific scale--the CCR scale--was developed. The teachers who helped construct it all agreed that the CCR scale represented the main goals of the comparison/contrast report assignment. This was in spite of the scale's containing at least one important flaw: With the exception of the format category, its categories were identical to those in the ESL Composition Profile. Both teacher 7 and I commented on this problem during the initial review of the scale. To become a true SFAS scale, the CCR scale needs to be revised. This could be done by substituting the generic content and organization categories with specific categories such as those included in the Personal Narrative Writing Scale described by Cooper (1977). For the comparison/contrast report assignments, these might be author's role, problem definition, treatment of comparison, support, and technical report organization.

Teacher questionnaire data

The questionnaire data gathered from the teachers in the two reading periods are summarized below in Table 8 for both the Profile and the CCR scale. Showing the teachers' reactions to the two scales, the data are presented in terms of mean scores and standard deviations for the eight Likert scale items on the questionnaire.

On the questionnaire forms, teachers also made written comments. For use with the comparison/contrast report assignment, most teachers commented that the CCR scale was superior to the Profile. Three of the six teachers felt that the CCR scale was particularly strong in the areas of content and organization. However, four indicated that despite its specificity, a classroom teacher using the CCR scale would still need to explain the individual parts or aspects of the assignment to students and to supplement use of the scale with specific comments on student papers. Here teacher 8 commented that "In teaching you can tell students how you will interpret a scale--so you don't have to spell everything out." As a result, despite the feeling that the CCR scale was better suited to the assignment, the comments indicate most teachers favored using the Profile. Here teacher 2 cited his familiarity with it, while teacher 7 felt it was easy to use. Teachers 5 and 8 commented that they liked the adaptability of scales such as the Profile. However, teacher 6 was openly dissatisfied with the Profile, writing it forced her to make judgments according to "someone else's standards"--not hers.

Teacher reactions during the discussion periods

The teachers' reactions to the six general questions posed during the two discussion periods are described below. Based on transcriptions from audiotape, the discussion sets forth the substance of the teachers' remarks as concisely and accurately as possible.

Table 8. Teacher questionnaire results[a]

Likert scale item	Profile Mean	Profile S.D.	CCR scale Mean	CCR scale S.D.
1. I would use this scale for this assignment in the future.	3.17	(0.98)	3.33	(1.37)
2. This scale will be confusing to students.	2.67	(1.37)	3.00	(1.26)
3. Using this scale will help me teach this assignment.	2.33	(1.03)	3.33	(1.21)
4. This scale will help guide students who must revise their reports.	2.42	(1.02)	3.33	(0.82)
5. Not all the descriptors in this scale are appropriate for this assignment.	2.83	(1.33)	2.17	(0.98)
6. This scale is well-suited for this assignment.	2.50	(0.84)	3.67	(0.52)
7. This scale is not a helpful evaluation guide for this assignment.	2.83	(1.17)	2.25	(0.88)
8. This scale is easy to use.	3.83	(2.17)	2.67	(1.21)

[a]Note: n=6 for both the Profile and CCR scale data. Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Undecided=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1.

1. Is it valuable to use a writing scale in ESL composition? Why or why not?

Teacher 8 responded to this question by noting that a writing scale can be an important tool in ESL composition, but should be adjustable to a variety of assignments. While detailed scales like the CCR scale might be valuable for establishing proficiency levels, in teaching a generic scale would be better since the instructor can always explain how the criteria will change from one assignment to the next. Such a scale, besides its use in teaching, is valuable in a curriculum like English 100 [English 100B, 100C, and 100D--the university-level ESL writing courses at Iowa State University] because it helps establish grading uniformity across the various courses taught. Four teachers openly agreed with these remarks, teacher 5 noting that use of a writing scale helps to standardize the way different teachers evaluate student writing. However, this teacher indicated the only practical way to do this was to use a general scale that could be adapted to different assignments.

Teachers 7 and 8 also indicated that a writing scale can be used to give feedback to students. Noting that she preferred to use a generic scale for this purpose, one, teacher 7, indicated that, when used to tally specific problem areas, writing scales could serve a valuable teaching function. Tallying errors on a rating sheet not only helped her grade more consistently but also helped students see patterns in their errors. Including everything from content to mechanical errors, such tallies could also be done by students by requiring them to go through their papers and count the various errors or problems the teacher had marked. In doing

such tallies, students were forced to take a more active role in recognizing their errors. However, such error recognition activities were best linked to some form of error correction by students.

Most of the teachers present agreed with these comments regarding the use of a rating scale for giving feedback to students. However, teacher 6 expressed that keeping such tallies sounded like a lot of "book work" for students and that she preferred to just have students make the corrections on another sheet of paper.

2. What do you think of the general format of the two scales used?

Almost all the responses to this question were concerned with the CCR scale. Regarding its format, teacher 8 noted that she experienced difficulty grading a certain paper because the CCR scale groups the descriptors for knowledge of material and purpose under the category of content. Although the paper in question was knowledgeable, the student's purpose was not clear. Thus, it was difficult to mark the student down for not having a clear purpose and yet at the same time indicate the paper was knowledgeable. Teachers 5 and 6 commented on other difficulties encountered in using the CCR scale. Teacher 5 noted that she experienced information overload using it and felt that students would be overwhelmed by the CCR scale. Voicing a related concern, teacher 6, who had earlier expressed her dissatisfaction with the Profile, indicated that grading with the CCR scale was frustrating because it was difficult to keep in mind what the student had written and at the same time to read and select the most suitable descriptor in each category. The Profile was annoying for the same reason. It was redundant to describe a category and then

repeat the definition in each performance level. Responding to this comment, teacher 7 noted that over time teachers would probably adjust to using the CCR scale just as they had adjusted to using the Profile and eventually would find it easy to use.

3. Can a writing scale help a teacher make more specific comments on student papers? If so, how?

In responding to this question, only teacher 2 referred to the use of a writing scale to help teachers make more specific comments on student papers. This teacher noted that he liked the addition of the format section in the CCR scale because formatting was an important matter which he discussed in class and tended to comment on a great deal. For him, having the format section on the scale itself would make it easier to comment on such problems. Although most of the other teachers liked the idea of having white space for comments on a rating sheet, no one else really addressed the question regarding scales and teacher comments. However, several indicated marking or tallying errors on a rating sheet helped provide specific feedback to students. Here teacher 7 stated that tallying errors or problem areas helped teachers provide more consistent feedback and made extensive commenting unnecessary. However, when used for this purpose, scales like the CCR scale and the Profile could be improved. Instead of having so many descriptors and performance levels under each category, performance levels like Excellent to Good, Good to Average, and so forth could be retained but the various descriptors listed separately. With such a change, a teacher grading a paper for content could still indicate the quality of the paper by choosing the appropriate

performance level but would also be able to specify problem areas by circling various descriptors. Used in such a fashion, a rating sheet could give part score grades as well as information regarding student strengths and weaknesses.

4. For a particular assignment, is it valuable or worthwhile to use a specific scale like the CCR scale? Why or why not?

Five teachers responded to this question. Teacher 4 liked the CCR scale a great deal and said he might use it in future comparison/contrast report assignments. Teacher 5 liked the idea of assignment-specific scales but indicated that they would be more useful for teachers than students. She explained herself by saying "What seems to be coming out is that writing scales are useful for the teacher. Comments on papers are useful for the students. Teachers will use these so that they can justify their grades as well."

Teachers 2 and 7 preferred to use a general scale because it provided some consistency in evaluating papers, the latter stating that the CCR scale could be made more general quite easily by just removing the descriptor "comparison is meaningful" under content. Finally, teacher 6, who earlier expressed her dissatisfaction with both the Profile and the CCR scale, indicated she did not like the idea of using a specific scale for a particular assignment.

5. Can an assignment-specific writing scale be used by students as a guide while they are revising an initial draft of a paper? Why or why not?

Five teachers responded to this question. In varying degrees, all questioned whether an assignment-specific scale could be used to help students revise an initial draft of a paper. Most indicated that teacher explanations or comments would still be required, teacher 7 commenting that students would always "need very concrete suggestions" for improvement. Teacher 6 was especially skeptical. She noted that having students use a scale during revision amounts to "teaching someone based on their inadequacies rather than teaching them to build on what they have and that is one thing I don't like about this. I feel like I'm grading people on what they don't have rather than grading people on what they do have. And it's hard to inspire them to try to make things clearer. And it's just a philosophical bent." Responding, teacher 8 stated that, given that each student paper is unique, a teacher has to deal with what a student has actually written "and then...continue this process of explaining this thing...[the student is]...talking about to an audience and weed out the parts that don't work...."

6. In terms of the effectiveness of an ESL writing program and the amount of communication among teachers regarding objectives, which approach in the long run produces better results, relying on generic scales for all assignments or having groups of teachers develop their own writing scales or checklists for specific assignments?

Most of the teachers who responded to this question indicated that, while it would be valuable for teachers to meet and discuss the criteria of particular assignments, the development and use of assignment-specific scales would be of limited benefit to an ESL writing program. Teacher 8

indicated that inexperienced teachers would find such discussions useful but that experienced teachers already know the criteria for teaching and grading the various papers assigned in a course. Teacher 5 noted that teachers should develop their own specific scales but would still have to tell students what they expect on each assignment and to use generic scales in the classroom. Three teachers criticized the idea of developing and using assignment-specific scales. Teacher 7 questioned whether writing features like organization would really differ from one assignment to the next and teacher 6 that using specific scales would hinder flexibility because in individual assignments teachers are always modifying the assignment criteria. Teacher 2 noted that having to explain scale criteria for each assignment would take a lot longer than if a generic scale were used for each assignment.

Student questionnaire data

The questionnaire data from the students who participated in this study are summarized in Table 9. The information in this table gives an indication of student reactions to the CCR scale after having used it as a guide during revision. Like the reader questionnaire results, the data are presented in terms of mean scores and standard deviations for the eight Likert scale items on the questionnaire.

Of the 12 students who filled out the questionnaire, seven also made written comments. For the most part, these comments indicate the students had mixed reactions about the CCR scale. Six expressed the opinion that using it helped them understand the criteria of the comparison/contrast report assignment better, but also indicated the scale was either too

Table 9. Student questionnaire results--CCR scale[a]

Likert scale item	Mean	S.D.
1. This writing scale is difficult to understand.	2.17	0.84
2. This writing scale is a good one.	3.83	0.84
3. There is too much detail in this writing scale.	3.25	1.21
4. This writing scale helped me write a better final draft.	3.75	0.75
5. This writing scale is not practical.	2.33	0.49
6. This writing scale should always be used for this assignment.	3.25	0.57
7. I found this writing scale easy to understand.	3.75	0.86
8. Using this writing scale to revise my paper took too much time.	3.33	1.30

[a]Note: n=12. Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Undecided=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1.

detailed or took too much time to use. One of these students suggested that a simplified criteria checklist like the one used in class for the assignment would be easier to use than the CCR scale. Out of the seven students who wrote comments, only one clearly disliked the CCR scale. However, he indicated that he was more opposed to the idea that writing

can be broken down into its component parts than any specific defect in the scale itself.

Analysis of teacher comments and correction markings

The comments and correction marking data gathered from the 50 comparison/contrast reports collected consisted of 157 comments and 787 correction markings. Viewed as a corpus of responses to specific student texts, these efforts to communicate with students focused mostly on sentence-level matters. This was plainly the case with the 787 correction markings tallied. Although these were not categorized, except for a few cases which were not clear, these markings focused almost entirely on discrete grammatical and mechanical problems found in the reports. For example, teachers frequently pointed out problems such as word deletion, subject-verb agreement, and spelling errors with shorthand expressions such as "del." or "^," "s-v," and "sp." Although the teachers' written comments did not focus on sentence-level features as much, they still tended to favor these matters, as Table 10 shows.

Table 10. Comment distribution: Rhetorical versus sentence-level comments and the percentage breakdown for each

	Number	Percent of total
Rhetorical comments	65	41.4
Sentence-level comments	86	54.8
Praise only comments	6	3.8
Totals	157	100.0

Based on the corpus of comments shown in Appendix H, this table indicates that 86 or 54.8 percent of the 157 comments made focused on sentence-level matters (i.e., comments categorized as focusing on vocabulary and expression, grammar, format, and mechanics).[1] In contrast, only 65 or 41.4 percent of the comments clearly focused on rhetorical matters (i.e., comments categorized as focusing on content and organization). Because it was not completely clear what they referred to, the six comments classified as "praise only" could not be assigned to either category.

As a whole, the 86 comments on sentence-level matters clarified and explained specific assignment criteria. Table 11 provides data on the distribution of these comments. Some focused on matters not outlined in the ESL Composition Profile. The comments on format concerns--criteria specific to technical writing not included in the Profile--are examples. These 38 comments--44.2 percent of the comments on sentence-level features--generally focused on concerns such as the positioning of headings, the layout of tables, and the use of abbreviations. In addition, of the 26 vocabulary and expression comments, 10 focused on register matters not specifically outlined in the Profile. These 10 comments--11.6 percent of the comments on sentence-level matters--were mainly concerned with the use of informal language inappropriate in a technical report. For example, one of these comments advised a student

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[1]Teachers 1 and 3 made 10 comments categorized as vocabulary and expression comments which could be classified as focusing on both sentence-level and rhetorical matters. These were comments which focused on register errors. Because they were mainly concerned with the use of vocabulary, these were considered to be closer to sentence-level than rhetorical comments.

Table 11. Overall distribution of comments on sentence-level matters

Comment category	Category total	Percent of total
Vocabulary/expression	26	30.2
Grammar	13	15.1
Format	38	44.2
Mechanics	9	10.5
Totals	86	100.0

writer employing the first person plural point of view to "maintain the third person objective point of view" throughout the report.[2]

Other comments on sentence-level matters--the 16 remaining vocabulary and expression comments and the comments on grammar and mechanics--tended to reinforce criteria already outlined in the Profile as the two examples below show.

"You need to work on prepositions and run-ons." (3-2)

"Check papers for spelling errors." (6-4)

The problem areas cited in these comments are all mentioned in the Profile (cf. the Profile rating sheet in Appendix A). However, other comments in this group went a step further by giving a more complete explanation of the problems identified. For example, the following comments addressed two problems noted in the Profile--preposition and word choice errors.

[2]Teacher 1, report 5 in Appendix H. Hereafter references to specific comments in Appendix H will be denoted by teacher and report numbers. For example, the comment cited above is from report 1-5.

> "Sounds odd...we usually deposit money in an account...never from" (3-1)
>
> "If you use a word like 'nefarious,' your audience will just have to look it up in a dictionary. Be simple, clear, and concise." (3-2)

It is significant that these two comments go beyond merely pointing out errors like the previous two. Rather, both indicate how readers might react to them. In suggesting that many readers would need a dictionary to understand the word "nefarious," the second comment is especially instructive.

For the most part, the 65 comments on rhetorical matters concerned with content and organization did not explain or clarify very well the assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the Profile. For one thing, despite the fact that technical reports must be well-organized, there were considerably more comments on content rather than organizational matters as Table 12 shows. This table indicates that 53 or 81.5 percent of these comments were concerned with content matters. In contrast, only 12 or 18.5 percent of the comments focused on organizational issues. However,

Table 12. Overall distribution of comments on rhetorical matters concerned with content and organization

Comment category	Category total	Percent of total
Content	53	81.5
Organization	12	18.5
Totals	65	100.0

more important than the type of comments made was their quality. Most of the comments on content and organization were quite short and vague. In fact, far from being text-specific, many of these comments could have been written for a variety of different assignments, as the examples below show.

"Discussion is brief" (1-1)

"Organization is fine" (1-3)

"Details needed here" (1-7)

"Excellent discussion" (1-9)

"A little long" (2-4)

"Too technical" (2-9)

"Poor organization" (4-1)

"Topic choice" (4-2)

"Needs detail" (4-3)

"No support in this paper" (4-6)

"A little short" (4-9)

"Incomplete" (5-2)

"Use paragraph transitions" (5-3)

"Narrow topic" (5-4)

"Meaning unclear" (6-2)

"Explain" (6-2)

"Sentence paragraph form!" (6-5)

"Too general" (6-6)

"Be more specific" (6-6)

The last comment ironically emphasizes the major problem with these attempts to communicate with students; for while teachers urge students to be more specific and precise in their writing, none of these comments is a good model for such writing.

Further, while some of the comments made addressed specific assignment concerns, these often did not provide enough information to be considered good cues for student revision. The following are examples of these latter comments.

> "Comparison is quite sparse" (1-1)
>
> "Information is a bit skimpy here" (1-5)
>
> "Introduction contains material which should be included in the discussion section" (3-2)
>
> "General treatment of topic--doesn't apply to a specific situation" (5-2)
>
> "No common basis for comparison?" (5-4)
>
> "Is this information relevant?" (6-2)

The first comment illustrates why these comments are ineffective. While identifying a problem with the comparison being made, it does not indicate precisely the nature of this problem. A major difficulty is the meaning of the word "sparse." Does it mean essential information is missing from the comparison? Or does it mean the comparison being made is not meaningful? Not knowing exactly what "sparse" implies, many students would likely be confused by this comment.

Only a handful of the 65 comments on content or organizational matters focused on specific assignment concerns in a substantive way. The following are two of the few exemplary comments:

> "The report lacks a specific problem to be addressed and hence the discussion and conclusion are too general. It would be better to narrow the topic to one problem--say production of tomatoes in Madison, Wisconsin. Then your discussion could have been more directed to the problem." (1-2)
>
> "I would think that you need to limit this judgment to yield only since you do not evaluate other factors such as disease, susceptibility, dry down time, stand, stalk strength, etc. in order to make an overall recommendation." (1-3)

As is evident, both provide information students would find helpful in remedying the specific problems identified. For example, in referring to an argument concerning two varieties of hybrid corn, the second comment tells the student in specific terms why he must limit his generalizations to corn yield only.

In that teachers make comments in response to specific strengths and weaknesses in student papers, the paucity of exemplary comments focusing on content and organization might have only indicated that the comparison/contrast reports were for the most part rhetorically sound papers and that the teachers did not acknowledge student achievement with specific comments. However, this was not the case. In examining the 50 comparison/contrast reports for four rhetorical features important in the assignment, I found one or more significant flaws in 44 of the reports. The results from this analysis are detailed in Table 13, which shows the type and number of rhetorical problems found in the reports contributed by each teacher. This table indicates the corpus of 50 comparison/contrast reports contained at least 103 serious rhetorical problems.

Table 13. Rhetorical problems identified in the comparison/contrast reports contributed by each teacher

Teacher	No. reports with one or more rhetorical problems[a]	Problem not addressed/ purpose not clear	Partial or complete lack of claim statements	Lack of meaningful comparison	Pattern of development not detailed	Totals
1	7	3	5	2	6	16
2	11	6	6	5	9	26
3	4	2	4	1	3	10
4	12	5	7	4	10	26
5	3	1	3	1	4	9
6	7	4	3	2	7	16
Totals	44	21	28	15	39	103

[a]Teachers 1 through 6 contributed 9, 12, 4, 13, 4, and 8 reports respectively.

Making up this total were 16 reports in which the problem addressed or purpose of the report was not clear, 28 reports which lacked claim statements technical readers depend on to follow the arguments such reports contain, 13 reports which did not compare the chosen technical solutions in a meaningful manner, and 39 reports which did not detail at the beginning the pattern of development to be pursued in the report. Among these 103 rhetorical errors, the number of problems identified in the reports contributed by each teacher ranged from 26 each for the reports contributed by teachers 2 and 4 to nine problems in the reports contributed by teacher 5.

A comparison of the data in Table 13 to the corpus of comments provides additional evidence that as a group the teachers did not identify and explain essential assignment criteria vaguely defined in the ESL Composition Profile. While it would be unreasonable to expect to find a specific comment for every one of the 103 problems identified, one might assume that a good number of these problems would have been addressed with such comments. Yet, this was not the case. While other rhetorical issues were at times addressed in the 50 reports and vague comments were written in response to some of the 103 problems identified, only six of these problems elicited error-specific written commentary, as Table 14 shows.[3]

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[3]Other rhetorical issues addressed with written comments included the lack of support for arguments made (e.g., reports 1-3 and 4-6) and the presence of irrelevant information (e.g., reports 1-1 and 6-2). Vague comments written in response to some of the rhetorical problems cited in Table 13 include "discussion is brief" (1-1), "poor organization" (4-1), "meaning unclear" (6-2), "explain" (6-2), and "too general" (6-6).

Table 14. Number of times an error-specific comment was written in response to one of the four rhetorical problems identified in the corpus of 50 comparison/contrast reports

	Problem not addressed/ purpose not clear	Partial or complete lack of claim statements	Lack of meaningful comparison	Pattern of development not detailed
No. times rhetorical problem occurred in the corpus of reports	21	28	15	39
No. times rhetorical problem identified/discussed via a specific written comment	5[a]	0	1[b]	0
Difference	16	28	14	39

[a]See reports 1-2, 1-4, 1-6, 2-11, and 5-2 in Appendix H.

[b]See report 5-4 in Appendix H.

This table indicates that five of these comments were made in response to reports not stating the problem being addressed or purpose of the report clearly and the other comment in response to a report in which the comparison being made was not clear. Sixteen instances of the former

problem and 14 of the latter did not elicit error-specific comments. Moreover, those reports lacking claim statements or failing to detail the pattern of development to be pursued--28 and 39 reports respectively--did not contain a single error-specific comment on these matters.

The fact that only six (or 5.8 percent) of the 103 rhetorical problems noted in Table 13 received an error-specific comment indicates that--regardless of previous teaching experience--all six teachers failed to respond to the rhetorical concerns identified. Table 15 provides data on teacher experience and the number and percent of identified rhetorical problems addressed with a specific comment by each teacher. This table shows that teachers 3, 4, and 6 with one, three, and five semesters previous teaching experience, respectively, did not make an error-specific comment on any of the rhetorical problems found in the reports they contributed. Teacher 2 with five semesters experience only addressed one or 3.8 percent of the 26 rhetorical errors found in the reports he contributed. Teacher 1 with 11 semesters experience wrote a specific comment for three or 18.8 percent of the 16 rhetorical problems found in the reports she contributed. Significantly, this teacher wrote the two exemplary comments on content matters cited earlier. Finally, teacher 5 with four semesters teaching experience addressed with specific comments two or 22.2 percent of the nine rhetorical errors found in the reports she contributed.

Table 15. Teacher experience and number and percent of identified rhetorical problems addressed with a specific comment by each teacher

Teacher	No. semesters teaching writing[a]	No. rhetorical problems identified in reports contributed	No. times a rhetorical problem identified/ discussed via a specific comment	Percent of identified rhetorical problems addressed via a specific comment
1	11	16	3	18.8
2	5	26	1	3.8
3	1	10	0	0
4	3	26	0	0
5	4	9	2	22.2
6	5	16	0	0
Totals		103	6	5.8

[a]These data are for fall semester, 1985, when the comments and correction markings were made. They thus differ slightly from those in Table 1 in Chapter III, which gives biographical data for May, 1986.

To summarize, this analysis indicates that most of the comments and correction markings found in the reports examined focused on sentence-level matters. As a whole, these comments tended to explain and clarify sentence-level criteria cited in the ESL Composition Profile as

well as special assignment features such as formatting and register. In contrast, the teachers' comments on rhetorical matters concerning content and organization did not explain or clarify assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the Profile. Moreover, evidence suggests that regardless of previous teaching experience, the teachers who contributed reports uniformly did not respond with specific comments to important rhetorical concerns.

Discussion

Research evidence presented in this study suggests that assignment-specific scales may be of considerable value to ESL writing teachers. Because of their specificity, they are certainly an improvement over generic scales. There is some evidence, for example, that assignment-specific scales could aid teachers in planning assignments. There is also evidence that such scales could be used to help teach the criteria of writing for a variety of assignments. There is even limited evidence that these scales could help provide effective diagnostic feedback to students. Yet, despite these apparent advantages, legitimate questions concerning assignment-specific scales can be raised.

One important question concerns the workability of procedures for developing assignment-specific scales and whether ESL writing teachers can construct such scales. Evidence gathered during this investigation suggests that ESL writing teachers can develop assignment-specific scales. However, in devising these scales they will likely encounter difficulties. One difficulty may arise from the fact that current procedures for constructing these scales lack specificity. This proved to be a stumbling

block during the development of the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (CCR scale) and was likely one reason for the poor quality of the primary trait scales developed in the study by Holdzkom et al. (1983).[4] However, more important than the lack of adequate instructions or guidelines for developing these scales is the factor of time. The teachers involved in this study did not have the time to work together to develop an assignment-specific scale employing the procedures outlined by Cooper (1977). Lack of time was also likely a factor in the study by Holdzkom et al. (1983) who report the primary trait scales constructed in their study were developed by teachers working alone. Moreover, many of the teachers who participated in this study seemed to lack the rhetorical expertise needed to develop such scales. Several of the teachers had difficulty conceptualizing how in rhetorical terms one assignment differs from the next. This finding is consistent with a result reported by Holdzkom et al. (1983) who noted that teachers developing primary trait scales had trouble formulating specific rhetorical criteria.

However, more significant than scale development issues is the question of how ESL writing teachers will react to assignment-specific scales. Evidence gathered during this study indicates that the six teachers who participated in the reading and discussion sessions recognized at least to some degree the pedagogical value of scales such as the CCR scale. In Table 8, for example, the teachers' mean responses

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[4]I found the instructions for developing these scales to be quite general. These instructions can be found in Holdzkom, Bebermeyer, and Wright (1982).

(strongly agree = 5, strongly disagree = 1) for items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 suggest that they felt the CCR scale was an improvement over the ESL Composition Profile for the comparison/contrast report assignment. Despite somewhat high standard deviations, item 3, which solicited responses to the statement "Using this scale will help me teach this assignment," provides an example. The teachers' mean response for the Profile was 2.33. In contrast, their mean rating for the CCR scale was 3.33. More noteworthy is item 6, which solicited responses to the statement "This scale is well-suited for this assignment." The teachers' mean response to this statement for the Profile was 2.50. In contrast, their rating for the CCR scale was 3.67. To some extent, the teachers' written and oral comments clarify these results. Several teachers noted the CCR scale was better suited to the assignment because it specified more than the Profile the rhetorical criteria under content and organization. Other teachers liked the addition of the format section which the Profile does not contain.

Yet, overall the teachers who participated in the reading and discussion sessions did not approve of the idea of using a specific writing scale for each assignment. Practicality was a major issue. Teachers 5, 7, and 8 indicated they preferred to use scales such as the Profile because they could be adapted to a variety of assignments. A common opinion was that teachers could adequately explain or clarify assignment criteria not included in a generic scale by means of oral explanations and written comments on student papers. Teacher 2 noted that having to explain a different scale for each assignment would take up more

class time than if a generic scale was used and teacher 6 that using such scales would hinder flexibility because in individual assignments teachers are always modifying the assignment criteria. Significantly, this latter teacher was opposed to the use of writing scales in general, expressing considerable frustration with both the Profile and the CCR scale. Finally, the teachers were generally opposed to the idea of having ESL teachers develop their own assignment-specific scales.

Concern over the amount of time needed to develop and use assignment-specific scales explains much of the teachers' disapproval of such scales. As noted earlier, time was clearly a factor during the development of the CCR scale, no teacher being able to contribute more than an hour of time to this project. Although the teachers were indirect, their statements regarding the practicality of using assignment-specific scales suggest that most agreed with teacher 2, who felt that having to use a different scale for each assignment would take too much time. Given the teachers' familiarity with the Profile, such a concern is understandable. No rationale detailing how to integrate the use of such scales into a given course or writing program has ever been advanced. No model courses which extensively employ assignment-specific scales exist. Yet, while little proof is available, it could be plausibly argued that time contributed developing and using assignment-specific scales would not be lost. Teachers might find, for example, that reliance on such scales would make assignment planning easier. Because of their specificity, such scales would also require less explanation than generic scales and, by facilitating student involvement in the instructional

process, provide teachers with more time to attend to substantive matters. Although they did not develop the scale they used, teachers using a specific scale for creative story writing in a study by Sager (1973) found this to be true. These teachers reported that, by freeing them from having to correct all the stories themselves, scale-based instruction gave them "time to search for more fruitful ways of helping children develop new practices [and] provide additional resources and activities" (p. 6). Their finding that less time was spent correcting student work suggests an important area where the use of specific scales in instruction can save time. Studies indicate writing teachers typically spend a great deal of time providing diagnostic feedback. Focusing only on written comments, Sommers (1982) notes that most teachers spend an average of from 20 to 40 minutes per paper writing comments. If such comments had a positive effect on student writing, the time normally spent writing them would be justified. But research in both native speaker and ESL settings indicates that written comments are generally not very effective (Hillocks, 1986; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986). An important reason for this is that many comments are written on final drafts after the assignment is complete--a time when grades often distract students from written comments (Larson, 1981).[5] In providing teachers with an alternate means for indicating strengths and weaknesses in student papers, a specific checklist could

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[5]Of course, the quality of written comments is also an important factor. Both Sommers (1982) and Zamel (1985) cite the vague and diffuse nature of most written commentary as reasons for this ineffectiveness. In reminding teachers of criteria needed in the draft being examined, an assignment-specific scale would likely help teachers make comments which are more specific and focused.

help reduce the need for clarifying commentary. Moreover, by encouraging feedback throughout the assignment, reliance on specific scales could help increase both the quantity and effectiveness of corrective feedback. Feedback from peers would help increase the amount of feedback and the provision for feedback during the formative stages of writing would result in more effective feedback. Both practices are recommended by researchers in writing pedagogy (Beaven, 1977; Hillocks, 1986).

While only tentative, these arguments in favor of using assignment-specific scales are consistent with Hillocks' (1982) recommendation that writing teachers should consider shifting their priorities from writing extended comments to assignment planning activities. Through well-planned assignments, instead of telling students afterwards why they failed, teachers could help students succeed in assigned writing tasks. Because they help specify the criteria of particular assignments, the development of assignment-specific scales should be considered a legitimate assignment planning activity. While not solving all the planning concerns teachers might have, developing such scales could help teachers identify assignment criteria which need to be stressed as well as model pieces of writing needed during classroom explanations of writing criteria. Further, it could help ESL teachers think more rhetorically about specific assignments--a problem encountered during the development of the CCR scale. This could be done by making the development of such scales a practical objective of informal discussions concerning assignments which the teachers involved in this study indicated already take place. Scales initially developed in such sessions need not

be perfect. They could be revised and corrected each time particular assignments are taught. For rhetorical criteria such scales would certainly be an improvement over generic scales.

The issue of time was not the only matter which concerned the participants in the two reading and discussion sessions. At least one teacher--teacher 6--expressed considerable frustration with writing scales in general. This teacher indicated that she disliked using both the Profile and the CCR scale. In commenting on her experience grading papers with scales, this teacher said: "I feel like I'm grading people on what they don't have rather than on what they do have. And it's hard to inspire them to make things clearer. And it's just a philosophical bent." Teachers such as this one are apparent advocates of a teaching approach Hillocks (1986) calls the "natural process mode." That is, they are teachers who "believe students are only stultified by exposure to what they see as arbitrary criteria, models, problems, or assignments" (p. 119). Because they are skeptical of structured teaching approaches, it is expected such teachers will resist the use of writing scales which by design imply a fixed conception of writing. However, writing teachers should be aware of Hillocks' (1986) finding that more structured approaches such as those involving scales generally produce greater improvement in student writing than natural process instruction. An apparent reason for this is that the former provide students with more procedural support.

Another important question concerns student reactions to an assignment-specific scale. The 12 ESL students who used the CCR scale as

a guide while revising their comparison/contrast reports had mixed reactions about the CCR scale. Six students indicated through written comments that using it helped them understand the assignment criteria. This explains the favorable mean responses for items 2, 4, and 7 in Table 9, which solicited responses to the statements "This writing scale is a good one," "This writing scale helped me write a better final draft," and "I found this writing scale easy to understand." The mean ratings for these three statements were 3.83, 3.75, and 3.75 respectively (strongly agree = 5, strongly disagree = 1). These results suggest that ESL students might accept the use of specific scales such as the CCR scale. However, whether they would prefer them over generic scales is unknown. The fact that one student was opposed to the concept of a writing scale may indicate that students will vary in their responses to writing scales. If true, such a finding would raise questions concerning the effectiveness of scale-based instruction.

Regarding the format of the CCR scale, several students commented that the scale was either too detailed or took too long to use. To some degree such reactions explain the mean ratings for items 3 and 8 in Table 9, which solicited responses to the statements "There is too much detail in this writing scale" and "Using this writing scale to revise my paper took too much time." The mean ratings for these statements were 3.25 and 3.33 respectively. These reactions to the CCR scale indicate a complex scale may confuse students. Quoting a comment made by teacher 5 during one of the discussion sessions, the risk of "information overload" accompanies the use of such scales. To avoid this problem, scales such as

the CCR scale need to be simplified for student use. A reasonable alternative to the full scale used in this study would be a checklist detailing the main scale criteria. In a written comment, one of the participating students suggested a checklist format would be better--a position supported by learning cue theory (Hillocks, 1986).

The final question focused on in this study concerned an assumption made by the teachers who participated in the two reading and discussion sessions. These teachers indicated that ESL teachers could adequately explain to students assignment criteria only vaguely outlined in generic scales. The teachers indicated that such explanations could take two forms, the first being oral in-class explanations and the second being specific, concrete comments on student papers. Because it was impossible to gauge the quality of the former, the analysis conducted only focused on written commentary made by six ESL teachers on 50 comparison/contrast reports. Nevertheless, the results raise serious questions about the assumption that ESL teachers can adequately explain assignment criteria only vaguely defined in generic scales such as the ESL Composition Profile. The analysis showed that most of the comments and correction markings found focused on sentence-level matters and these tended to explain or clarify sentence-level criteria cited in the Profile as well as specific features relating to formatting and register. However, the teachers' comments on rhetorical matters concerning content and organization did not explain very well assignment criteria only vaguely defined in the Profile. Moreover, evidence from the analysis suggested that regardless of previous teaching experience, the teachers who

contributed reports did not respond with specific comments to important rhetorical concerns.[6]

Because no studies focusing on how scales influence commenting behavior have been done, these results are difficult to interpret. It may be that ESL teachers using generic scales simply need to periodically review the comments they make to ensure that these effectively cue students to specific-assignment goals. Zamel (1985) recommends this approach. Such comment monitoring might also take place in group sessions with other teachers. However, although no proof is available, I believe that the use of assignment-specific scales might have a similar effect. That is, teachers using such scales might monitor their comments more than when using generic scales.

In summary, the results from this investigation indicate that ESL teachers can develop assignment-specific scales. However, in doing so they will likely encounter difficulties, the most significant obstacles being the time needed to devise such scales and the need for rhetorical expertise. The six ESL teachers who rated and commented on the CCR scale generally did not approve of such specific scales. An apparent reason for this was a concern that developing and using such scales would take too much time. This may be a legitimate complaint. However, ESL teachers should not reject assignment-specific scales out of hand. Besides having considerable instructional potential, there is some evidence that using

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[6]It is impossible to be certain, but it seems reasonable to assume that, like the written commentary examined, some of the teachers' oral explanations may also have been vague and ineffective.

them could actually save time. The reactions of the 12 ESL students who rated and commented on their use of the CCR scale suggest that ESL students might accept assignment-specific scales. However, their responses indicate scales used by students should be in the form of a simplified checklist. Finally, the analysis made of teacher commentary raises serious questions about the assumption that ESL teachers can adequately explain assignment features not clearly defined in generic scales such as the Profile. This finding suggests that ESL teachers using generic scales may need to monitor their commenting behavior more.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Summary

This two-phase study set out to answer some important questions regarding assignment-specific scales. During the first phase three questions focusing on the practicality and acceptability of this new scale approach were addressed. Because they are designed for particular assignments, such scales appear to be an improvement over generic scales, one obvious advantage being their greater rhetorical specificity. Yet, it was not known whether current procedures for developing assignment-specific scales were workable or if ESL teachers could be expected to construct such scales. In addition, it was not known how ESL teachers and students would react to them. To help answer these questions, an assignment-specific scale known as the Comparison/Contrast Report Writing Scale (CCR scale) was constructed employing procedures outlined by Cooper (1977). As scale editor, I kept notes on problems encountered during its development. Then, once developed, six ESL teachers and 12 ESL students in special sessions rated and commented on the CCR scale. The findings for the questions posed in this phase were as follows:

1. ESL writing teachers can develop assignment-specific scales. However, in devising these scales they will likely encounter difficulties. One problem might arise from the fact that current procedures for constructing these scales lack specificity. In this study vague procedures complicated the development of the CCR scale. However, more important than the issue of scale development is the factor of time. Developing assignment-

specific scales takes a great deal of time—time which ESL teachers might not have. This was certainly the case in this study. A third difficulty is that ESL teachers might lack the rhetorical expertise needed to develop such scales. It is noteworthy that many of the teachers who helped develop the CCR scale had trouble conceiving of specific rhetorical criteria.

2. The ESL teachers who participated in this study recognized at least to some degree the pedagogical value of scales such as the CCR scale. Yet, the teachers who rated and commented on the CCR scale generally did not approve of the idea of using a specific writing scale for each assignment. An apparent reason for this was a concern that developing and using assignment-specific scales would take too much time. This could be a legitimate complaint. Yet, while more study is necessary, it is arguable that time contributed developing and using assignment-specific scales would not be lost. Besides their specificity, by facilitating student involvement in the instructional process, such scales could actually save time by making instruction more efficient and reducing the need for post-assignment teacher commentary. This by itself could encourage teachers to shift their priorities from writing comments to more productive assignment planning activities. Developing assignment-specific scales might be one such activity.
3. ESL student reactions to the CCR scale indicate ESL students might accept the use of assignment-specific scales. However,

more study is needed to know whether students would prefer them over generic scales. Acceptance of such scales will likely vary according to student. In their reactions to the CCR scale, the students indicated that it was too complex. This finding suggests that, when used by students, scales such as the CCR scale should be simplified, a reasonable alternative being a checklist format.

During the discussion sessions involving ESL teachers, most of the teachers indicated that they preferred to use a generic scale applicable to a wide variety of assignments. The common opinion was that, even though a generic scale expressed writing criteria in general terms, teachers could adequately explain specific assignment features through oral in-class explanations and specific, concrete comments on student papers. Because I questioned the teachers' assumption regarding the efficacy of such explanations and comments, a fourth research question was formulated. Addressed during the second phase of this study, this question did not focus on the quality of oral teacher explanations. Such a research focus would have required an entire investigation in itself. Instead, only the comments and correction markings made on 50 comparison/contrast reports were examined. These comments and markings, written by six ESL teachers employing a generic scale known as the ESL Composition Profile to evaluate these reports, were analyzed for how well they explained aspects of the assignment not clearly defined in the Profile. The findings for this fourth research concern were as follows:

4. Most of the comments and correction markings found on the 50 comparison/contrast reports focused on sentence-level criteria cited in the Profile as well as specific assignment features relating to formatting and register. However, the teachers' comments on content and organizational issues often failed to clarify assignment matters not well-defined in the Profile. Moreover, regardless of previous teaching experience, the teachers did not respond with specific comments to important rhetorical concerns. Because no studies focusing on how scales influence teacher commentary have been done, these findings were difficult to interpret. Perhaps ESL teachers using generic scales simply need to monitor their comments more to ensure their effectiveness. This could be done in group sessions with other teachers. Assignment-specific scales might also help teachers monitor their comments.

These findings do not validate the use of assignment-specific scales in ESL composition. Although such scales appear to have considerable instructional potential, several obstacles besides the issue of time bar their immediate use. One obstacle concerns procedures for developing assignment-specific scales. These procedures need to be detailed in a clear and precise manner to ensure that ESL teachers following them can successfully construct such scales. Expert rhetoricians could certainly do this. However, after reading articles on these scales (e.g., Cooper (1977) and Lloyd-Jones (1977)), experienced teachers with appropriate coursework in rhetoric might also be able to write effective sets of

instructions. Such teachers could probably improve on the instructions provided, for example, by Cooper (1977). But beyond the lack of adequate scale development procedures is a larger problem. No rationale explaining how to integrate the use of such scales into a given course or writing program has ever been advanced. Nor have assignment-specific scales ever been extensively employed in a model course. Thus, important operational questions need to be addressed if this new scale approach is to be implemented. Teachers might want to know, for example, whether the model pieces of writing needed in scale-based instruction can easily be found. They might also want to know what rhetorical criteria should be taught in a given course and in what sequence. Finally, they might want to know if some writing criteria are better taught using other approaches.

However, apart from issues concerning assignment-specific scales, this study raises important questions regarding generic scales such as the Profile. Judging from publications and presentations at professional conferences as well as evidence found in this study, there appears to be fairly wide acceptance of generic scales among ESL writing instructors, a common justification for this being that such scales promote grading uniformity among teachers (Brown & Bailey, 1984; Jacobs et al., 1981; Mullen, 1977; Reid & O'Brien, 1984; Holliday, Hughey, & Wormuth, 1986, March). Brown and Bailey (1984) cite, for example, the need "to standardize the grading procedure" used by teachers in a particular course as one reason for developing the generic scale reported in their study (p. 28). Even in this study some of the teachers involved in the reading and discussion sessions cited grading uniformity as a reason for supporting

continued use of the Profile. Concern for fairness explains much of this support for generic scales. Teachers want to grade students consistently and reliably and studies indicate generic scales help them do this (Brown & Bailey, 1984; Jacobs et al., 1981; Mullen, 1977). Yet, because effective instruction must be a writing teacher's first priority, concern for uniform grading practices is not enough. Scales and procedures for using them must not only be reliable but must also be effective teaching tools. Because they define rhetorical criteria quite generally, a question can be raised as to whether generic scales really help teach such criteria. Evidence exists that students do not understand the rhetorical requirements of particular assignments. Larson (1981), for example, notes that students are often puzzled over the grades they receive, a finding confirmed by Zirinsky (1978) who in a study of 100 tenth-graders reported extensive student confusion over the evaluative criteria employed by teachers. Whether reliance on generic scales accentuates or reduces such confusion is a matter ESL teachers using such scales need to address.

Limitations

Because of special circumstances, the findings reported in this study need to be qualified. These circumstances were the following:

First, only eight ESL teachers and 12 ESL students participated in this study. Larger sample sizes for these groups would have lent more validity to the reported data. It is possible higher sample populations would also have produced different results.

Second, with six or fewer semesters of experience teaching writing, five of the eight teachers who were involved in this study can be regarded as either inexperienced or novice teachers (see Table 1 in Chapter III). It is possible different results would have been obtained with a group of only experienced teachers. However, it should be noted here that the comment analysis I performed did not show a great deal of difference between more experienced and less experienced teachers.

Third, because of flaws in the design of the CCR scale--particularly its grouping of rhetorical criteria under the broad headings of content and organization, teacher and student reactions to it must be qualified. It is possible they would have reacted differently if its rhetorical criteria had been arranged in categories more appropriate for an assignment-specific scale such as author's role, problem definition, treatment of comparison, and technical report organization.

Fourth, the ESL students who rated and commented on the CCR scale were not asked to simultaneously rate and comment on a generic scale such as the Profile. Thus, with no knowledge of student attitudes toward the use of a generic scale, their reactions to the CCR scale were difficult to interpret. Without further study it is impossible to say whether ESL students would prefer assignment-specific scales or a single generic scale.

Fifth, coming from only 50 comparison/contrast reports, the comments and correction markings analyzed in this study represented only a small sample of ESL teacher commentary. Moreover, the 50 reports from which comment data were taken were not chosen randomly from the set of 90

reports written during fall semester, 1985. It is possible different results would have been obtained if different assignments had been selected and larger samples used.

Sixth, because I analyzed the teacher commentary from the 50 comparison/contrast reports myself, the findings may be less reliable than if a panel of trained readers had performed the analyses undertaken. However, they concur with results reported in much larger studies of teacher commentary such as Sommers (1982) and Zamel (1985) for native speaker and ESL settings respectively. The latter's finding that ESL teachers often do not respond to rhetorical matters with effective comments lends credence to the data reported in Tables 13 and 14 in Chapter IV that only six (or 5.8 percent) of the 103 rhetorical problems identified received an error-specific comment.

Implications

The results from this investigation suggest more study is needed to see if the assignment-specific scale approach to writing instruction can be effectively implemented. However, in the interim ESL teachers would likely benefit by reading relevant literature on writing scales. Such reading would not only acquaint them with assignment-specific scales, but would also help them understand the uses and limitations of the generic scales currently used in ESL composition. Evidence gathered in this study suggests that ESL teachers may not be well-informed about such matters. Most of the teachers involved in the reading and discussion sessions, for example, did not understand how scales can be used to assist students

while they are revising their papers. Moreover, a few teachers had misconceptions about generic scales. A comment made by teacher 4 during the development of the CCR scale provides an example. Despite the fact that the Profile was only designed for expository writing (Jacobs et al., 1981), this teacher asserted that the "Profile is valid for all writing."

The results reported here also suggest that ESL teachers need to re-evaluate current instructional uses of generic scales, asking themselves first if the methods employed improve student writing. In particular, they need to ask whether generic scales help students understand rhetorical criteria or whether in this regard they confuse students. Teachers using generic scales also need to monitor their written commentary, asking themselves whether their comments explain or teach assignment features not clearly defined in the generic scale they are using. Such monitoring might be effectively promoted in group sessions with other teachers.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on only four questions concerning assignment-specific scales and their possible uses. Many more questions remain to be investigated. Among these are questions concerned with assignment planning and teaching. It would be useful to know, for example, whether ESL teachers using assignment-specific scales plan assignments more effectively than when relying on generic scales or traditional planning methods. It would also be useful to know whether the development and use of assignment-specific scales help ESL teachers think more rhetorically about specific writing assignments. With regard to teaching, an important

question is whether scale-based instruction involving the use of assignment-specific scales is indeed more effective than instruction relying on the use of generic scales. Here an important question is whether the assignment-specific scale approach promotes more effective teacher explanations of writing criteria than when generic scales are used. Another question is whether the use of assignment-specific scales can in the long run save time for teachers by making assignment planning and teaching more efficient. Concerning students, significant questions include what age groups and ESL proficiency levels are best suited for instruction involving the use of scales and what influence affective factors have on the acceptance and effectiveness of such instruction. Other questions concern student preferences: Would students prefer the use of assignment-specific scales over generic scales and what scale format is best? For peer evaluation and feedback purposes, is a checklist format more acceptable than a full scale? Still another question concerns student motivation: Are students more motivated to write when assignment-specific scales are used than when instruction is based on generic scales?

With regard to teacher feedback, it would be useful to know how scales influence such feedback: Does the use of assignment-specific scales, for example, help teachers provide better feedback than when generic scales are used? What is the character of assignment-specific scale-generated feedback? Is it more text or assignment-specific than generic scale-generated feedback? Do teachers using assignment-specific scales monitor their feedback more than when using generic scales?

Some final questions concern current obstacles barring the adoption of the assignment-specific scale approach: Can an effective rationale be made for integrating this approach into current courses and writing programs? Can the model pieces of writing needed in scale-based instruction easily be found? What rhetorical criteria should be taught in various courses and in what sequences? Finally, are some writing criteria better taught using other approaches?

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my major professor, Dr. Roberta Vann, for her help and patience during the writing of this thesis. I am especially thankful for her timely suggestion that I consult Hillocks' (1986) recent survey of composition research findings. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Roberta Abraham, Dr. Donald Payne, and Dr. Joanna Courteau, for their professional guidance and suggestions for improving this thesis. Their encouragement and support will not be forgotten.

I am especially grateful for the help of the seven ESL teachers and twelve ESL students who participated in this study. While anonymous, these individuals made this investigation possible. Special thanks as well to Dr. Frederick Lorenz, who provided helpful advice concerning the questionnaires used in this study; Dr. Glenn Broadhead and Kevin Carpenter for useful discussions; and Dr. John McCully for his friendship, guidance, and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Gayle Gouran and her son Brian for their encouragement and companionship during the writing of this thesis; my sister and brother-in-law, Connie Klein and Mark Tjelmeland, for the rest found in their home; my parents, Edward and Luetta Klein, for standing behind me; and my children, Adriana and Craig, for believing in me.

The Iowa State University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research reviewed this project and concluded that the proposed procedures were appropriate, that the potential benefits outweighed the risks, and

that the rights and welfare of the human subjects involved were not in jeopardy.

APPENDIX A

ESL COMPOSITION PROFILE

STUDENT DATE TOPIC

SCORE	LEVEL	CRITERIA	COMMENTS
CONTENT	30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable • substantive • thorough development of thesis • relevant to assigned topic	
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of subject • adequate range • limited development of thesis • mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail	
	21-17	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of subject • little substance • inadequate development of topic	
	16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of subject • non-substantive • not pertinent • OR not enough to evaluate	
ORGANIZATION	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression • ideas clearly stated/supported • succinct • well-organized • logical sequencing • cohesive	
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy • loosely organized but main ideas stand out • limited support • logical but incomplete sequencing	
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non-fluent • ideas confused or disconnected • lacks logical sequencing and development	
	9-7	VERY POOR: does not communicate • no organization • OR not enough to evaluate	
VOCABULARY	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range • effective word/idiom choice and usage • word form mastery • appropriate register	
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range • occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage *but meaning not obscured*	
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range • frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage • *meaning confused or obscured*	
	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation • little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form • OR not enough to evaluate	
LANGUAGE USE	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex constructions • few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions	
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple constructions • minor problems in complex constructions • several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions *but meaning seldom obscured*	
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex constructions • frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions • *meaning confused or obscured*	
	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules • dominated by errors • does not communicate • OR not enough to evaluate	
MECHANICS	5	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: demonstrates mastery of conventions • few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing	
	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing *but meaning not obscured*	
	3	FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing • poor handwriting • *meaning confused or obscured*	
	2	VERY POOR: no mastery of conventions • dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing • handwriting illegible • OR not enough to evaluate	

TOTAL SCORE READER COMMENTS

APPENDIX B

Comparison/Contrast Report Assignment Handout

Assignment: Assume that you are working as a consultant for your academic department, a company, or another entity. As an expert in your field of study, you have been asked to evaluate two items, two devices, two methods, two processes, or two proposals in order to help your supervisors make a decision about which of the two to choose for a project. You will make your comparison and contrast of the two and recommendation in a formal report which will include the following:

1. transmittal letter (one separate sheet)
2. title page (one separate sheet)
3. abstract (one separate sheet)
4. table of contents (one separate sheet)
5. list of illustrations (if applicable; one separate sheet)
6. report proper (Use headings to set off major sections. The required length must be between 750 and 1000 words.)
    a. introduction
    b. discussion (set up in a comparison/contrast organizational format)
    c. conclusions and recommendations
7. Appendices (if applicable)
8. Endnotes (recommended)
9. Bibliography (at least five references are required)

Our textbook has an example of a formal report on pp. 434-447. This example report is not a comparison/contrast report, but it has many of the formal report features cited in the above list including a transmittal letter. You may use the title page format shown on p. 434 or the more professional example which I gave to you in a handout. (Do not use the abstract format shown on p. 437. This is a poor example. Use instead the model abstract which I plan to hand out in class.) Our textbook does have a good discussion of the argument formats which may be used in a comparison/contrast paper on pp. 185-195. An example comparison/contrast paper is shown on pp. 190-192.

Report Proper: The report itself is, of course, the main part of this assignment. The introduction should include a description of the project, a clear statement of the problem, and a discussion of the two solutions which you will analyze. The discussion section of the report should follow one of the organizational formats suggested by our textbook on pp. 185-187. (See the back of this sheet.) In the discussion section keep in mind at all times that you must present arguments for both sides fairly and must not be openly biased toward one of the solutions. Being both thorough and fair in your arguments is a mark of professionalism. In the conclusions and recommendations section you must review the evidence recommend the best solution.

*Three Different Comparison/Contrast Organizational Formats:

1. Subject by Subject Method

   Subject I (EE at ISU)

      Point A (cost)
      Point B (research facilities)
      Point C (faculty quality)

   Subject II (EE at MIT)

      Point A (cost)
      Point B (research facilities)
      Point C (faculty quality)

2. Point by Point Method

   Point A (cost)

      Subject I (EE at ISU)
      Subject II (EE at MIT)

   Point B (research facilities)

      Subject I (EE at ISU)
      Subject II (EE at MIT)

   Point C (faculty quality)

      Subject I (EE at ISU)
      Subject II (EE at MIT)

3. Similarities/Differences Method

   Similarities of Subjects I and II

      Point A (cost)
      Point B (research facilities)

   Differences between Subjects I and II

      Point C (faculty quality)

*EE = Electrical Engineering; ISU = Iowa State University; MIT = Massachusetts Institute of Technology

APPENDIX C

Scale Development Interview Form

The purpose of this interview is to generate ideas regarding the content and form of a proposed writing scale for the comparison and contrast papers written in English 100D. The interview itself should last about twenty minutes and will be tape recorded. In order to make this time more productive, please read the instructions below explaining the general procedure and the type of questions to be asked. Think about these questions and try to answer them as best you can before the interview. Jot down your answers and bring these to the session. Keep in mind at all times that the proposed scale should be one which can validly assess papers over the range of quality typical of English 100D writing.

Preparing for the interview:

Step 1: Along with this sheet you will find an ESL Composition Profile rating sheet. Used for some time now in English 100D, this rating sheet (also known as the Profile) should be very familiar to you. How do you feel about the use of the Profile in English 100D? Have you been satisfied with the Profile when you have used it to evaluate the comparison/contrast technical reports assigned in this course? Why or why not?

Step 2: Assume that you have been asked to devise a writing scale specifically designed for the comparison/contrast technical reports assigned in English 100D. One of the first matters you will have to consider is what general categories to include in such a scale. Writing scales usually have several general categories. For example, designed for general ESL writing, the Profile has five such categories: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics. In contrast, a scale used to judge writing done in freshman English here at Iowa State employs four general categories: Material, Organization, Expression, and Mechanics. So, think about this matter. What general categories do you think should be included in a writing scale for the comparison/contrast technical reports assigned in English 100D?

(Note: To help fix your mind on this task a little better, please read the example comparison/contrast report from English 100D which has been given to you. Remember that this is only one paper and that the final writing scale must help readers evaluate papers over a broad range of quality.)

General writing scale categories which you have chosen:

Why did you choose each of the above categories?

Does the type of argument typical of a comparison/contrast paper deserve special attention in the writing scale which you have been asked to think about? If so, what are the special features and patterns of a comparison/contrast technical discussion? How might these features and patterns be reflected in the writing scale's general categories and descriptors?

(Step 2--continued)

Are such features as audience awareness, register, format, and clarity of ideas important in a comparison/contrast technical report? Why or why not? How would you define each these features?

Given the fact that the typical comparison/contrast assignment in English 100D requires a student to really produce three separate pieces of writing, namely, a transmittal letter, an abstract, and the report itself, should a writing scale for this assignment also be divided into three different scales or sections? Or, would an overall scale for all three parts of the assignment suffice? Why or why not?

Step 3: All writing scales employ some kind of point system for arriving at a total score from a sum of part scores. For example, the Profile is a 100 point scale with the following subscale weights: Content, 30; Organization, 20; Vocabulary, 20; Language Use, 25; and Mechanics, 5. Given 100 points, how would you weight the general categories which you chose in Step 2?

General Categories	Weight

What is your justification for the point system which you have arrived at?

Step 4: Another important matter is the number of performance levels a writing scale has. Performance levels help the evaluator sort writing features according to levels of quality. The Profile, for example, has four such levels: Excellent to Very Good, Good to Average, Fair to Poor, and Very Poor. Based on a forced choice approach, the Profile requires readers to ask if an aspect of the writing like Organization basically supports the effort to communicate or detracts. Depending on the initial decision made, the reader is then asked to choose how well the communication has succeeded or how completely it has failed. However, other performance level approaches exist. One well known scale employs three levels: High, Middle, and Low. Still another devised for ESL writing has five performance levels. What number of performance levels would be most appropriate for the writing scale which you have been asked to think about? How would you label the different levels? Justify your decisions.

Step 5: What format should the rating sheet take? Is it valuable to leave "white space" for comments on the rating sheet like that provided by the Profile? Or, since teachers often comment more on student papers than on rating sheets, would it not be better to fill up the rating sheet with a more detailed and complete schema of categories and descriptors? These might then be circled or underlined by a teacher wishing to give specific feedback to students. State your thoughts on this matter below.

APPENDIX D

April 28, 1986

Dear [Name]

[Scale Development Letter]
119

Attached is a tentative version of the writing scale I am developing for the comparison/contrast-report assignment in English 100D. The scale itself is only meant for evaluating the basic report itself. I decided to exclude the transmittal letter and abstract from the scale because including them seemed too cumbersome. I would like you to look at the particular scale I have come up with and give me some feedback on it. You will immediately note that it contains six sections and covers both sides of the sheet. I decided to use both sides for two reasons. First, and most important, I felt that an adequate writing scale for this assignment would have to be more detailed than putting the whole scale on one side would allow. Second, as I have constructed it, you will note that content and organization are on side one and vocabulary/expression, grammar, format, and mechanics are on side two. This division seemed nice to me since it corresponds to the process approach to writing. That is, side one might be utilized to register tentative scores, etc. during the earlier stages of writing and side two would serve as a guide during the later editing stages of writing. Anyway, give me your comments on this.

You will note that I have retained the 100 point scale. There was no way to jettison this and still retain the relative weights for each category. (The relative weights in this scale are: Content-25%, Organization-25%, Vocabulary/Expression-15%, Grammar-25%, Format-5%, Mechanics-5%.) You will note that each category has five performance levels. Based on your comments during my interviews with you and the other teachers who have taught English 100D, this five level system is designed to roughly correspond to the letter grades A, B, C, D, and F. If you add up the low scores for Excellent to Good you will arrive at 93. If you add up the low scores for Good to Average, the total is exactly 80. If you add up the low scores for Average to Fair, the total is 67. Thus, the three top levels roughly correspond to A, B, and C. (It doesn't work so well for the "D" and "F" levels, but few students receive such grades on their final drafts in English 100D anyway.) I have worked with this numbering system a great deal and it's the best I can come up with. If you have a better or alternate idea, please let me know.

Questions you might focus on:

Do you like the categories?

Do you like the descriptors?

How would you change the categories/descriptors?

Do you like using both sides of the sheet?

Is there enough white space for comments?

What do you think of my format for the format, grammar, and mechanics categories?

What do you think of the performance level scheme tied to grade levels?

Other comments:

Craig

P.S. Please write on this sheet and/or the scale itself and return both to me when it is convenient.

APPENDIX E

English 100D

COMPARISON/CONTRAST REPORT WRITING SCALE

Student: _____ Date: _____

CONTENT

Score	Level	Performance Descriptions	Comments
	25-23	EXCELLENT TO GOOD: knowledgeable command of subject matter • content/approach appropriate to audience • problem addressed/purpose are clear • comparison is meaningful • discussion is thorough, substantive, and unbiased, providing information audience expects and needs • all material relevant • gaps/limitations outlined	
	22-20	GOOD TO AVERAGE: good command of subject matter • content/approach mostly appropriate to audience • problem addressed/purpose are fairly clear • comparison generally meaningful • with minor lapses discussion is thorough, substantive, and unbiased • material is mostly relevant • most gaps/limitations outlined	
	19-17	ADEQUATE TO FAIR: may have only adequate command of subject matter • content/approach sometimes inappropriate • problem addressed/purpose may be less than clear • comparison may not be completely meaningful • discussion is not always thorough, substantive, and unbiased • some material may not be relevant and some gaps/limitations not outlined	
	16-13	MARGINAL TO POOR: may have only marginal command of subject matter • content/approach often inappropriate • problem addressed/purpose are quite unclear • comparison is likely muddled or absurd • discussion is incomplete, lacks substance, and may be unbiased • may contain much irrelevant material • gaps/limitations often not outlined	
_____	12-0	UNACCEPTABLE: poor command of subject matter and/or severe problems with appropriateness of content/approach • problem addressed/purpose completely unclear • very weak/insubstantial in all other areas	

ORGANIZATION

	25-23	EXCELLENT TO GOOD: predictable/appropriate pattern of organization outlined at outset • well-organized/focused--writer in firm control • easy to follow--fluency of expression supported by competent use of parallel structures • information readily accessible to decisionmaker--direct, clear topic statements acting as guideposts to comparisons being made • support for generalizations • transitional words/phrases help reader follow pattern of argument
	22-20	GOOD TO AVERAGE: pattern of organization mostly predictable/appropriate throughout • fairly well-organized/focused • good fluency/parallel structure use with minor lapses • information fairly accessible to decisionmaker/topic statements mostly clear • generally good support/use of transitional words/phrases
	19-17	AVERAGE TO FAIR: evident pattern of organization but not completely predictable nor always appropriate • focus sometimes unclear • choppy--may have some difficulty with parallelism • information accessible but not readily so--topic statements sometimes unclear • evident yet uneven support/use of transitional words/phrases
	16-13	MARGINAL TO POOR: pattern of organization not readily evident • focus often unclear • mostly non-fluent/lacking in parallel structures • reader must work hard to obtain information • inadequate support/use of transitional words/phrases
_____	12-0	UNACCEPTABLE: no evident pattern of organization • little or no focus • non-fluent/ideas confused and disconnected • very poor in all areas

☐ Content + Organization	Additional Comments:
☐ Vocabulary and Expression + Grammar + Format + Mechanics	
☐ Total Score	

APPENDIX F

Directions for Teachers

Folder Contents

+ two comparison/contrast reports from English 100D
+ two copies of a particular writing scale
+ one questionnaire

Steps

1. Read and evaluate the first comparison/contrast report (the top one) using the attached writing scale to guide your judgments. Be sure to give a part score for each category and a final total score. Try to make the best judgments you can in the time allotted, but don't agonize over your decisions. You may write comments on the writing scale or the report itself, but you are not required to do so. (Note: Consider the report to be a final draft which you are evaluating.) 10 minutes

2. Read and evaluate the second comparison/contrast report and score it in the same way you were instructed to read and evaluate the first report in Step 1 above. 10 minutes

3. Complete the questionnaire which you will find in your folder. 10 minutes

Teacher Questionnaire

Directions: In the section below please rate the writing scale which you just used while reading and evaluating two comparison/contrast reports written by students in English 100D. For each statement circle the number under the descriptor which most closely approximates your opinion. After you finish, please use the space below to make any additional comments about the writing scale you just used.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I would use this scale for this assignment in the future.	5	4	3	2	1
2.	This scale will be confusing to students.	5	4	3	2	1
3.	Using this scale will help me teach this assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
4.	This scale will help guide students who must revise their reports.	5	4	3	2	1
5.	Not all the descriptors in this scale are appropriate for this assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	This scale is well suited for this assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
7.	This scale is not a helpful evaluation guide for this assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
8.	This scale is easy to use.	5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

Scoring Results

Table A. Scoring results for the report "THE PHYSIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS BETWEEN TWO PLANT GROWTH HORMONES"

Group I--Profile				Group II--CCR Scale			
Categories	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3	Categories	Reader 4	Reader 5	Reader 6
Content	26	30	27	Content	21	19	20
Organization	17	15	10	Organization	21	21	18
Vocabulary	18	17	18	Vocab./Expres.	13	12	11
Language Use	20	23	22	Grammar	22	18	17
Mechanics	4	5	4	Format	4	4	2
				Mechanics	4	3	4
Total	85	90	81	Total	85	77	72
Mean = 85.3		S.D. = 4.5		Mean = 78.0		S.D. = 6.6	

Table B. Scoring results for the report "RECOMMENDATION FOR GENERATING CASH FLOW BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF TWO ALTERNATIVES"

Group I--Profile				Group II--CCR Scale			
Categories	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3	Categories	Reader 4	Reader 5	Reader 6
Content	28	30	28	Content	23	22	18
Organization	19	19	20	Organization	24	23	21
Vocabulary	18	19	17	Vocab./Expres.	13	14	11
Language Use	20	24	21	Grammar	22	22	22
Mechanics	5	5	4	Format	5	5	5
				Mechanics	5	4	4
Total	90	97	90	Total	92	90	81
Mean = 92.3		S.D. = 4.0		Mean = 87.7		S.D. = 5.9	

Table C. Scoring results for the report "A RECOMMENDATION TO FIND THE BEST SOLUTION TO APPEAL FOR A ZONING VARIANCE"

Group II--Profile				Group I--CCR Scale			
Categories	Reader 4	Reader 5	Reader 6	Categories	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3
Content	22	21	26	Content	22	22	20
Organization	16	14	17	Organization	20	23	19
Vocabulary	15	14	15	Vocab./Expres.	13	12	12
Language Use	19	17	18	Grammar	21	20	19
Mechanics	3	4	4	Format	4	4	4
				Mechanics	5	4	4
Total	75	70	80	Total	85	85	78
Mean = 75.0		S.D. = 5.0		Mean = 82.7		S.D. = 4.0	

Table D. Scoring results for the report "METHODS FOR ANALYSIS OF ELEMENTS OF SOLID STRUCTURE"

Group II--Profile				Group I--CCR Scale			
Categories	Reader 4	Reader 5	Reader 6	Categories	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3
Content	21	21	20	Content	22	19	17
Organization	13	13	13	Organization	21	19	17
Vocabulary	13	13	13	Vocab./Expres.	11	12	12
Language Use	18	17	14	Grammar	18	20	19
Mechanics	3	3	3	Format	2	2	5
				Mechanics	2	4	4
Total	68	67	63	Total	76	76	74
Mean = 66.0		S.D. = 2.6		Mean = 75.3		S.D. = 1.2	

APPENDIX G

Student Questionnaire

Directions: In the section below please rate the comparison/contrast report writing scale which you were asked to examine and use while writing the final draft of your comparison/contrast report. For each statement circle the number under the descriptor which most closely approximates your opinion. After you finish, please use the space below to make any additional comments about the comparison/contrast report writing scale. (Your responses and comments will remain anonymous. Do not sign your name to this sheet.)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. This writing scale is difficult to understand.	5	4	3	2	1
2. This writing scale is a good one.	5	4	3	2	1
3. There is too much detail in this writing scale.	5	4	3	2	1
4. This writing scale helped me write a better final draft.	5	4	3	2	1
5. This writing scale is not practical.	5	4	3	2	1
6. This writing scale should always be used for this assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I found this writing scale easy to understand.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Using this writing scale to revise my paper took too much time.	5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

APPENDIX H

Teacher Comments

Teacher #1

Report	Score[1]	Comments[2]
1	77	-Discussion is brief (C) -Comparison is quite sparse (C) -New pages for each section (F) -See p. 486 (#2, second example) for punctuation with however (M) -Format (F) -Center (F) -New page (F) -Historical information not relevant in this type of report (C) -Logic gap here (V/E) -Restrictive clause--no commas (M) -Format this table (F) -New page (F)
2	82	-The report lacks a specific problem to be addressed and hence the discussion and conclusion are too general. It would have been better to narrow the topic to one problem--say production of tomatoes in Madison, Wisconsin. Then your discussion could have been more directed to the problem. (C) -Good delineation of factors of contrast (C) -Then is not a conjunction; it cannot connect sentences (G) -Less is used with noncount nouns, few with count (V/E)
3	83	-Format (without the summary) is fine (F) -The conclusions seem hastily drawn, but that is beyond the scope of my assignment. (C) -Organization is fine (O)

[1]ESL Composition Profile scores for the entire comparison/contrast report assignment.

[2]The abbreviations after each comment correspond to the following comment categories: C=Content, O=Organization, V/E=Vocabulary and Expression, G=Grammar, F=Format, M=Mechanics, and PO=Praise Only.

(Teacher #1/Paper 3--continued)

Report	Score	Comments
		-I would think that you need to limit this judgment to yield only since you do not evaluate other factors such as disease, susceptibility, dry down time, stand, stalk strength, etc. in order to make an overall recommendation. (C) -Separate page (F) -This would seem to be a hastily drawn conclusion, but I'll leave it to your agronomy professors to judge. (C)
4	83	-Factors of comparison/contrast are well delineated. (C) -The problem addressed needs to be more specific--in other words, what is the particular problem Dr. Hinz wants this for? (C) -Separate page (F)
5	85	-Report a bit brief (C) -Format is excellent (F) -Subordination problems (G) -Good identification of factors of comparison (C) -Maintain the third person objective point of view rather than shifting to first person plural (V/E) -Information is a bit skimpy here (C) -Frag...subordinate clause (G) -Format of your report is excellent (F)
6	87	-The report would have more focus if you had set up a problem. Then your comparison could reflect a direct relationship to one situation. Your recommendation could be more conclusive. (C) -Good clear-cut analysis (C) -Subordinate here to show logical relationship (V/E) -Don't you need a qualification here? if that sample is representative of the total population (C) -Separate page (F) -Separate page (F)
7	90	-Center the title/Center two lines (F) -Use separate pages for each section.... List page numbers here (F) -New page (F) -The dashes in the process are not the clearest way to present the list of steps. (F)

(Teacher #1/Paper 7--continued)

Report	Score	Comments
		-Awkward here--infinitives might work better "is to trim and slice pork ham, mix the meat with seasoning and curing agents, spread the mixture by hand on bamboo trays, dry, and roast." (V/E) -Good identification of points of comparison (C) -Details needed here (C) -Separate page (F)
8	92	No Comments
9	97	-Separate page (F) -Excellent format (F) -Excellent discussion (C)

Teacher #2

Report	Score	Comments
1	82	No Comments
2	83	-Format isn't quite right (F)
3	84	No Comments
4	85	-A little long (C)
5	85	No Comments
6	89	-A little long (C)
7	90	No Comments
8	90	No Comments
9	91	-Too technical (C)
10	92	No Comments
11	94	-Purpose is not real clear (C)
12	95	No Comments

Teacher #3

Report	Score	Comments
1	81	-Register seems too informal at times (V/E) -Center all lines correctly (F) -Antonio...you continue to think and write in Spanish too much. Your sentences seem like pure Spanish. Thus, they sound odd. (V/E) -Do you mean the people are short in stature or do you mean there are not enough employees? (V/E) -Make more direct (V/E) -Word choice--too informal (V/E) -Sounds odd...we usually deposit money in an account...never from (G) -Awkward sentence (V/E)
2	86	-You know a lot about this subject and developed an interesting case. (C) -Introduction contains material which should be included in the discussion section (O) -Be careful about being "too fancy" (e.g., "nefarious") (V/E) -Avoid informal language (V/E) -You need to work on prepositions and run-ons (G) -Work on hyphenation (M) -Indiana's abbreviation (Ind. and not In.).... However, try to avoid abbreviating in a title page like this (F) -Very professional! You just need page numbers. (F) -Good argument/good point...shows a lot of thought (C) -Revise...is ungrammatical as is (G) -Word choice...use immediately...instantly sounds too drastic (V/E) -Don't try to be so fancy because it doesn't work! Choose simple words (yet not too informal ones) which your audience will know. (V/E) -Much of this paragraph should really be in the discussion section of your report (O) -If you use a word like "nefarious," your audience will just have to look it up in a dictionary. Be simple, clear, and concise. (V/E) -Just state your three points here only...the rest is confusing (C) -Too many negatives (V/E) -Too informal (V/E) -You should not state your intention to reject it until the conclusion of your report (O) -"Bigger" is too informal and has a nontechnical connotation (V/E)

(Teacher #3/Paper 2--continued)

Report	Score	Comments
		-You could have put this on the previous page (F) -Good diagram (F)
3	87	-Good (PO) -Better to avoid using contractions in a formal report (F) -Good idiom! (V/E) -Good point (C) -Criteria...plural form already...no need for "s" (V/E) -We discussed this word together.... It still sounds odd to me. I don't know exactly what you mean. Just because something is "popular" doesn't mean it is good. (V/E) -Criteria--plural/criterion--singular.... Latin words with Latin singular and plural endings (V/E)
4	91	-Much improvement since the beginning of the semester!! Good!! (PO) -First draft means "rough draft" and this is not a rough draft (V/E) -Avoid abbreviating--especially on a title page (F) -Avoid contractions in formal written English (F)

Teacher #4

Report	Score	Comments
1	78	-Poor organization (O) -Language use (G)
2	80	-Lots of fragments (G) -Topic choice (C) -Language use (G)
3	81	-Language use (G) -Needs detail (C)
4	86	-"So, since, because" construction (G)
5	87	-Why these 8? Need more reasons (C)
6	89	-No support in this paper (O) -Did not answer why people use std. tillage (C)

(Teacher #4—continued)

Report	Score	Comments
7	89	No Comments
8	90	No Comments
9	90	-A little short (C)
10	95	-Good, you win your argument (PO)
11	96	No Comments
12	97	No Comments
13	97	-Great paper (PO)

Teacher #5

Report	Score	Comments
1	83	-What are these requirements? (C)
2	85	-General treatment of topic—doesn't apply to specific situation (C) -Center (F) -Who is this report to? (C) -Your purpose could be more specific if you compared accounting cost systems for a particular product. (C) -Quotation marks here (M) -Incomplete (C) -Authors? (C)
3	85	-Use more paragraph transitions (O) -This is the format for an informal report. See pp. 198-99. (F) -Use paragraph transitions (O)
4	90	-Narrow topic (C) -Use paragraph transitions (O) -Indent paragraphs (M) -Check papers for spelling errors (M) -Center (F) -No common basis for comparison? (C) -Paragraph transition necessary—use more throughout this paper (O) -You seem to have a common basis for comparison. (C)

(Teacher #5/Paper 4—continued)

Report	Score	Comments
		-You could show that you're discussing similar points about magazines and newspapers through subheadings. (F) -Your report could have been more specific if you had compared/contrasted newspapers and magazines for one product. (C) -Indent 5 spaces (F)

Teacher #6

Report	Score	Comments
1	72	-Be consistent in the type of centering/aligning of information (F) -Improper hyphenation (M) -Not a complete sentence (G) -You are giving specific prices/costs when you are discussing very general situations (C) -Meaning unclear (V/E)
2	80	-Meaning unclear (C) -Is this information relevant? (C) -Explain (C) -Ask me about this in class (F)
3	81	No Comments
4	83	Unclear (V/E)
5	85	-Put the authors closely to the titles (F) -No need to state this--it is assumed that you will choose the more suitable text (C) -Are these your words? (C) -Sentence paragraph form! (O) -Sentence paragraph form (O) -Reference (C) -Underline the titles of books (F)
6	90	-Too general (C) -Examples (C) -Paragraph (M) -Explain more...which is better? Why? (C) -Same paragraph (M) -Be more specific (C)

(Teacher #6--continued)

Report	Score	Comments
7	90	-Good (PO)
8	94	-Break into more than one sentence (G) -Good (PO)